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## Mentoring Student Teachers' Professional Thinking and Classroom Practice on an 11-18 Distance Learning PGCE: A Case Study of Post-16 Teaching and Challenge as a Mentor Strategy

### Thesis

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**M9781468**

**Mentoring student teachers' professional thinking and classroom practice  
on an 11-18 distance learning PGCE: a case study of post-16 teaching and  
challenge as a mentor strategy**

**Doctor of Education (EdD)**

**September 2001**

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## **Abstract**

This research investigates the mentoring needs and experiences of students on a part-time distance learning secondary PGCE in England and Wales. A case study of post-16 teaching was conducted on a sample of English students and mentors over a six month period, during which challenge was problematised as a mentor strategy. Five research instruments were developed and used iteratively to generate qualitative data revealing student perceptions about post-16 teaching and mentor responses.

The study reveals significant problems for student teachers as they learn to teach post-16, which were confirmed by mentors. First, that mentoring in relation to post-16 teaching is inconsistent. What support is given varies greatly, and there is only limited evidence of challenge being used in a context which appears to warrant it as a training strategy. Second, and as a consequence, students feel underprepared at the end of their 11-18 PGCE for the demands of post-16 teaching. This is because mentors focus their training in areas other than post-16, reflecting the lack of attention to post-16 teaching in the Standards. Third, students invariably possess a false preconception of post-16 teaching, which mentors have not always been able to challenge. Little attention is given to effective post-16 teaching strategies in the literature, and mentors have shied away from discussing the contentious nature of the English canon post-16. Fourth, students and mentors describe the demands of learning to teach post-16 differently to pre-16. The main issue is the need for students to be trained to differentiate their subject knowledge by effective teaching strategies, particularly in the divide between Year 11 and Year 12.

The results impact on my own professional practice as a teacher educator, and illuminate more effective models of post-16 mentoring. The study concludes that a shared discourse about learning to teach post-16 needs to be in place. Challenge could then be used by mentors to develop student teacher professional thinking and classroom practice post-16. If students were consistently trained to teach post-16 more effectively, it is possible that pupils would benefit, leading to improved results.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**



This research investigates the thesis that teacher education is underdeveloped in preparing secondary student teachers for post-16 teaching. It aims to illuminate the importance of the mentor's training role as student teachers develop post-16 teaching skills. The mentor role, involving experienced school teachers training student teachers during school-based practice, has been prescribed both in the statutory regulations (most recently DfEE, 1998) and in the research literature. This research explores student teacher perspectives on, and expectations of, post-16 teaching, and relates these shared concerns to reflections upon the actual experience, asking the question: what training would students want from their mentor?

To focus the study, a sample of cases drawn from PGCE English students and their mentors is investigated. The study is bounded by selecting a relatively small number of cases involving post-16 teaching and analysing the features of student needs and mentor responses in detail. Mentoring is viewed as occurring in a social situation, in a school context, over a period of time (Gomm et al, 2000). The case study of post-16 mentoring, which draws on the Open University (OU) PGCE is intended to demonstrate what is likely to happen in other cases of post-16 mentoring (Hammersley, 2001).

The theoretical proposition of challenge as an appropriate mentor strategy in the context of post-16 teaching is explored, with confirmation sought from mentors as to their role in supporting and challenging student teachers in developing skills specific to teaching post-16. Challenge, active mentor intervention advocated as a key element in much of the literature, is conceptualised as cognitive dissonance (Daloz, 1986), introduced by the mentor to question student thinking and critique student preconceptions and tacit assumptions. Such challenge, it is argued, should be used in the context of a supportive and trusting training relationship. It separates mentoring from what has previously been a supervisory role in Initial Teacher Training (ITT), to one in which a mentor's vision of where the student is going is vital.

The key objective of this study is to find evidence with which to highlight ways of improving student teachers' post-16 teaching skills in both Advanced (A) level and its alternatives. This is attained by developing an understanding of students' professional thinking, their critical and reflective insights into the issues around post-16 teaching. Equally important is developing an understanding of how those issues affect post-16 classroom practice.

The location for this research on the mentoring of post-16 teaching is exclusively in schools. Although other post-16 contexts may well reveal similar concerns to the ones expressed here, I have not investigated teaching in sixth form colleges, FE colleges or in work-based training. Neither have I investigated those post-16 courses taken part-time or at evening classes. Because the focus is on post-16 teaching in ITT, the study concentrates on the experience in state schools, although a minority of the research participants had gained some post-16 teaching experience in independent schools. This context is a vital component in understanding the situation in which students and their mentors find themselves in relation to post-16 teaching. The context is both contentious and important, because secondary ITT is currently faced with a shortage of student teachers, and the post-16 setting has recently experienced a level of scrutiny resulting in Curriculum 2000 (QCA, 1999). Topicality is important if this research is to have an impact on practice.

To avoid confusion, I refer to student teachers as students. If participants have referred to their teaching of post-16 students, I have altered this to post-16 pupils.

## **Autobiographical origins of a professional doctorate**

This topic is a particular enthusiasm for me (Burgess, 1985a) for three main reasons. First, the topic's phase specific focus arose from the fact that, for the majority of my professional career I have been an English teacher working with 16-19 year olds, for the first five years in a Further Education college, and for the latter nine years in the post-16 centre of a large comprehensive school. This experience brought the realities of the academic/vocational divide into sharp relief, working as I did with vocational and pre-vocational, GCSE resit and A level pupils. I taught right across the ability range, from pupils with no previous qualifications to those aiming for four A grades at A level. This emphasised for me the importance of differentiation post-16. I was certainly disabused of any notion of post-16 pupils being an academically motivated, homogenous group. I also recalled nothing specific from my own secondary PGCE which offered adequate preparation for teaching across such a range post-16.

Second, the interest in processes supporting students in learning to teach originated from my later professional role as mentor to PGCE and B.Ed students. As my teaching and pastoral duties were wholly post-16 it was perhaps inevitable that my particular engagement with, and observation of student teacher practice concentrated on post-16 opportunities. I was able to provide my mentees with significant teaching practice in academic and vocational areas where both subject content and pedagogy made different demands of new teachers than 11-16 teaching. At the time (1994-1996) 16-19 education was under scrutiny by Dearing (1996) and government ministers were considering modifications to the then twin track (academic A level/vocational GNVQ) curriculum. It seemed appropriate to give intending teachers a sustained taste of post-16 education, and for a mentor to offer guidance and challenge specific to this phase. Reflecting on this experience I noted that my mentees found a disjunction between their over high expectations of the capabilities of post-16 groups and the range of differentiated strategies needed to teach a broad and variously motivated pupil body.

Wishing to pursue more informed reflection upon my own mentor role, and the issues that were beginning to emerge for me around student teachers learning to work confidently and competently in the post-16 classroom, I registered for the new Masters module “E830 Mentoring” from the Open University. In considering a mentor’s training role, challenge was presented as an interesting and important strategy to move a trainee from novice to expert (Open University, 1995). This suggested the possibility of research questioning whether mentors, charged with training secondary student teachers to a Standard meriting the award of QTS 11-18, are able to offer challenge as well as support.

However post-16 teaching appeared to be absent from the various conceptualisations of mentoring presented. I subsequently extended my interest in a pilot study for a small-scale research proposal on a further OU Masters module “E835 Educational Research in Action”. This was premised on work with student teachers at one of the Higher Education institutions for which I mentored. Although keen to take the research further, the time available to pursue what seemed like an original idea beyond Masters to Ph.D was very limited to a full-time Senior Teacher with domestic commitments.

The potential to take the idea forward to doctoral level, retaining a professional orientation, came with the Open University’s decision to offer progression from its Masters programme to a part-time Ed.D. This coincided with my change in career to full-time university based teacher educator with the Open University. Hence, my personal and professional experiences coalesced to inform what became this study of Open University PGCE students and their mentors.

The third significant biographical factor has been my own history as a new researcher, coming out of limited experience as a teacher researcher in school settings. For example, I employed small scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviewing with teacher colleagues exploring attitudes and training needs in relation to the emerging General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) curriculum in projects on Open University courses “EP851 Applied Research in

Educational Management” and “E834 Educational Management in action”. I suspected that the responses I received from colleagues in these studies were fuller than if I had not been known to the teachers interviewed. This research was eventually followed up in two further schools and produced two conference papers and a journal article (Butcher, 1998).

On my preparatory research on E835 I used semi-structured group interviewing with student teachers. This experience illustrated for me the potential of discussion for sharing meaning amongst participants, and the difficulties, not least clerical, in the conduct of such approaches. Equally significant was that, early on in my new post as a teacher educator, I collaborated with a more experienced researcher colleague using postal questionnaires and group interview to research mentor strategies. This exposed issues around analysis of qualitative data which emphasised explicit conceptualisation of key terms. Eventually three conference papers and a journal article (Burgess and Butcher, 1999) were produced.

Added together, this limited research experience allows me to place myself tentatively as a quasi-participative researcher, used to employing rapport (Ball, 1993) and mutuality (Goodson, 1985) when researching qualitatively with fellow professionals working in schools. I spoke the language of secondary English teaching, I was empathetic, and so the data collected here is different than if it had been collected by a 22 year old full time researcher with no teaching experience. I believe my own role as a new researcher in my early forties, with experience of the processes I was interested in, is significant. My professional status acted as an entry badge, and my interest in mentoring tallied for my participants with my known role as a mentor trainer.

For mentors and students, I was not coming to this research out of the blue as a stranger (Stenhouse, 1984). Neither was I an anthropologist seeking to make sense of the unfamiliar. Rather, I was operating as a recent practitioner, a recent mentor and a current teacher educator in familiar territory. If anything, I aimed

to make the familiar strange (Burgess, 1984b) by demonstrating the limited understanding of post-16 practice in an area taken for granted.

### **Professional Rationale**

For me, the distinctive nature of the Ed.D offers a more comfortable setting for my research than the Ph.D. This dissertation is practice orientated, in that my own professional role as a teacher educator is set in the context of changing post-16 policy initiatives. For this reason, I will include reflexive accounts (Walford, 1998) of the researcher within the research, and a discussion of personal influences on the research processes. I am conscious of being the chief research instrument (Nisbet and Watt, 1984) and of the issues raised as a consequence.

The relevance of the Ed.D for this research lies in the opportunity to draw out the implications for informing better practice and advancing knowledge in my own work with mentors and student teachers on school placements trying to teach post-16 as effectively as possible, and that of teacher education colleagues similarly engaged. This is not unrelated to a current, powerful policy rhetoric around improving educational standards post-16 and a developing idea that GCSEs taken at 16 should no longer be perceived as the end of learning.

### **Rationale for Case Study**

Case Study was chosen as a methodology likely to illuminate the particular conditions in which student teachers learn to teach post-16. I chose a combination of research methods (Delamont, 1984) to produce the case study in order to provide more than one source of evidence for my claims. Such an approach also allowed me to focus on richer data to provide an in-depth and holistic picture of student teachers learning to teach post-16. Research across a number of settings, using a number of methods was intended to offer some triangulation of my findings. With an interest in the mentoring of student teachers on school experience I had to follow the pace of events I was studying

according to the placement window and the calendar of activities for the final cohort of PGCE English students. As a part-time researcher there was insufficient time for participant observation, so I conducted condensed fieldwork in a disciplined time frame (Stenhouse, 1984).

This methodology developed iteratively out of my preparatory work on E835 and Part 1 of the doctorate. I began on the former with group interviewing of student teachers, investigating the amount of attention post-16 teaching was given by mentors. Analysis of the data suggested the prioritising of pre-16 and the consequential ad hoc approach to post-16 mentoring. This led in the latter to a focus on students describing the mentoring they had received in relation to post-16 teaching and whether this met their needs. This confirmed the range of differing experiences and the need for more support in this phase. Drawing on insights gained from such experience, this study has utilised the responses and discussion in an electronic teaching conference to formulate issues for an electronic questionnaire. The responses from this in turn informed a semi-structured schedule for student teachers in group and individual interviews and mentor interviews. Student teacher expectations from the first phase of this research were matched to subsequent experiences elicited in the follow up study. Both were offered to mentors for comment or confirmation in a penultimate phase. Outstanding issues were clarified or confirmed by telerecorded interviews with students after their final placement.

### **Rationale for originality as doctoral research**

There are three additional contextualising factors which make this original territory for a piece of doctoral research. First, I am looking at areas in the discipline that have not been looked at before (Phillips and Pugh, 1994). This, importantly, means empirical work on the specific needs and behaviours associated with the mentoring of post-16 teaching within the context of a Postgraduate teacher training course. Neither has the experience of mature trainees on a part-time distance learning PGCE been investigated in relation to their preparedness to teach post-16.

Second, there has in recent years been increased government attention given to staying on and success rates post-16 (culminating in Curriculum 2000), without attention given to the needs of new teachers trying to teach post-16 effectively. This research probes for what is not obvious in that issue.

Third, and related to this, is the fact that post-16 education was sidelined from the centrally driven National Curriculum. As such, teaching in this phase has not been subject to the same scrutiny as KS3 and KS4 and so the role for mentors in their work with student teachers is less explicit. This research asks why. This is especially significant given that competence in post-16 teaching is included in, but largely peripheral to the ITT Standards (DFE, 1992, DfEE 1997, DfEE 1998).

It would seem that such a study would be of interest to fellow professionals, particularly secondary student teachers, those mentors charged with supporting them, other post-16 teachers, and policy makers who appear to have made assumptions about the unproblematic nature of post-16 teaching.

## **Structure**

To make sense of such a complex, but under-researched area, I intend to investigate three themes in my literature review. First, I will draw on the literature on post-16 teaching to establish the case for an enhanced mentor role in this phase. Second, I will analyse the literature on the mentor strategy of challenge to frame the need for a proactive training role. Third, I will investigate the literature on post-16 English teaching to exemplify the need for mentoring post-16. The study is structured this way to focus the case study according to the issues raised by the research question.

I then offer a rationale for the eclectic methodology chosen (Adelman et al, 1984), a description of the five methods of data collection used, how the key questions were developed, and an analysis of the appropriateness of the approaches employed, taking particular account of the ethical issues.



My research findings are organised into three chapters, reflecting the themes examined in the literature review: post-16 teaching and the role for mentors; mentoring conceptualised as support and challenge; English as an exemplification of the need for mentoring post-16. Data evidence includes the voices of students, the voices of mentors, and researcher observation notes.

My conclusion highlights three issues, offers recommendations for improving practice and enhancing policy and includes a reflexive self-evaluation of the research process.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

## Introduction

*The Standards represent a missed opportunity to integrate the needs of the increasing number of teachers likely to be pursuing a mixed timetable of vocational and academic work within a school context. (Butcher, 1998, p.581)*

*Challenge as a mentor strategy is an important part of becoming a thinking professional. (Burgess and Butcher, 1999, p.45)*

*The possession of an English degree does not offer much uniformity, and mentors are well advised not to expect it. (Goodwyn, 1997, p.42)*

My research investigates how post-16 teaching in schools impacts on what ITT mentors do in their training role with students. I have taken the mentor role in this instance to be a range of activities undertaken by a secondary school teacher designated as a mentor, whose role is training students to teach while on school placement. By focussing on the post-16 phase, I am exploring two key issues. The first is an argument that post-16 is an important but marginalised aspect of ITT. The second is a proposal that issues in post-16 teaching are sufficiently controversial to give mentors much with which to engage in their training role. This leads me to analyse challenge as one particular mentor strategy often referred to in the literature. Challenge seems to offer potential benefit in any effort to improve the effectiveness of a student's post-16 teaching. It is thus relevant to my research question. In order to narrow the focus, I have chosen to investigate the mentor's role in post-16 teaching through the example of English, and my review reflects the contentiousness of beliefs about post-16 English.

The focus of my study is an under-researched and overlooked one, the mentoring of student teachers as they learn to teach in the post-16 classroom.

Because it is not an aspect of teacher education illuminated to any great extent by previous academic studies, I have deliberately explored a wide range of key texts to draw out significant themes and establish the relevant background theory for my study. As a result of my reading, the review is organised into three themes to provide a focus for my storyline. I begin by analysing the policy and quality context in which secondary ITT operates, particularly as it affects post-16 teaching. This provides a framework for the substantive section on post-16 policy and practice and the role for mentors which follows. My concern is to highlight the prevailing questions and issues in post-16 teaching in schools, and then relate these to the role mentors are considered to play in ITT.

Having established that there is much for the mentor to engage with in any training encompassing post-16 teaching, I then draw out the varied conceptualisations of the mentor role, noting no one model is yet dominant or generally accepted. I then consider, as a strategy given much academic credence, challenge, and consider the possible use for challenge in effective mentoring post-16. Important issues raised in the literature, for example the proposal that mentors should challenge more than they do, are then related to an example of one subject in ITT: English. This final theme considers the literature on English teaching in order to exemplify the problems and issues associated with learning to teach post-16. The literature review will conclude with an outline of the potential in post-16 for greater mentor involvement.

Bloomer (1997) comments on the long-standing preoccupation of university departments of education with the compulsory sector. School-based post-16 teaching is under-represented in the research literature. Aside from work on curriculum and assessment frameworks post-16, there appear to be two significant gaps for both practitioners and policy makers. The first is in the area of post-16 pedagogy and the second is in the training needs of student teachers in relation to that pedagogy. This is particularly glaring given what the centrally prescribed Standards, the regulatory framework for the training of secondary student teachers, say about post-16 teaching. The most recent government directive in ITT, Circular 4/98 (DfEE, 1998) documents how the award of

secondary Qualified Teacher status (QTS) depends on demonstrating familiarity with:

*Post-16 examination syllabuses and courses, including vocational courses...understand, for their specialist subject, the framework of 14-19 qualifications and the routes to progression through it...understand the expected demands of pupils in relation to...post-16 courses...understand and know how to implement the assessment requirement of current qualifications for pupils aged 14-19. (pp 9, 15)*

This appears to confirm that it is considered an important requirement for student teachers to gain insight into post-16 teaching. Indeed, on OfSTED ITT inspection criteria if students on an 11-18 PGCE course have not gained experience in teaching post-16 pupils it becomes a non-compliance issue. There is, however, no clear guidance as to what that post-16 teaching experience actually means. The problem for mentors is that they are insufficiently advised, given the vagueness of the appropriate standards, on how much post-16 teaching their students will need to satisfy the standards. When quantity remains a grey area, mentors might be forgiven if they provide minimal contact post-16 in order to “tick the box”.

Mentors might also struggle under a lack of clear guidance on the quality of post-16 training to which their students are entitled. This raises a number of serious questions that could undermine mentor confidence in their role. Should students follow a sequential training post-16 that starts with observation and goes through the experience of collaborative teaching to solo responsibility? Should students be given the opportunity to critically reflect on their own, and indeed their mentor’s post-16 lesson? Should there be a dialogue about post-16 teaching within the mentoring discourse? A positive answer may be given and evidenced in some instances, but if so it may be due to the special diligence of individual mentors. Otherwise, there is only limited recognition of the existence of different approaches post-16. For example, particular emphases in the

Standards are placed on Key skills. However, none of the literature has yet connected mentoring with post-16 teaching in schools in order to clarify if mentors are able to give such new areas any more than cursory attention.

Changes introduced in the crucial Circulars (DFE, 9/92, DfEE, 9/97, DfEE, 4/98) have resulted in school-based mentors being required to support, train and assess students on ITT courses against prescribed standards. Analysis of the literature on mentoring strategies raises important issues for this study, since post-16 teaching appears to be both integral to the Standards yet largely absent from the literature. It is a crucial aim of this study to bring these two themes together.

Given the significance of the National Curriculum 11-16 at Key Stages 3 and 4, and the priority OfSTED give to effective teaching pre- rather than post-16, it is perhaps unsurprising that most of the literature on mentor strategies concentrates by implication on effective mentoring with students learning to develop their teaching skills with pupils in the 11-16 age range. This study intends to build on that body of work by supplementing the literature in three ways. First, by analysing, and trying to draw some conclusions from what has been said about learning to teach post-16. Second, by investigating prescriptions and descriptions of challenge as a strategy of potential relevance to the post-16 setting. Third, to exemplify the need for mentor challenge in post-16 teaching by an exploration of the literature on PGCE English students and their mentors.

Attempts by central government to improve standards in ITT are a key contextualising factor for the questions this study will ask. The three Circulars referred to above have all required explicit development of the role of the school-based mentor in an effort to focus on the quality of support and guidance provided by practising classroom teachers. When formally introduced, mentoring was perceived to offer a way out of the dissatisfaction with university-based training which, it was alleged, failed to integrate theory and practice. However, backing for initiatives like mentoring are not ideology-free.

Mentors have become part of central government's policy objectives for improving standards in schools. As such, my research framework has had to take account of the political arena in which mentoring has symbolised a shift to the school-based training of teachers in the last decade, and away from the university. This is doubly important given the political tensions between those wishing to preserve the academic status of A levels, and those seeking to broaden the post-16 curriculum in schools.

Mentors also figure by implication in pronouncements by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). An increasing priority is being placed on partnerships between schools and universities in delivering courses of Initial Teacher Training. For example:

*Schoolteachers must now take part in planning courses, in teaching and assessing trainees, and in moderating their assessments. What used to be teaching practice has in effect been replaced by substantial periods of work-based learning. Partnerships between providers and schools are now established as the main agent of delivery of effective training.*  
(TTA, 1999, p.3)

Mentors are expected to assume a training role. This study will aim to establish the learning needs of student teachers and the mentor training role in relation to this notion of partnership as it affects post-16 teaching.

OfSTED are also alert to the importance of the quality of mentors and the mentoring process. In their Framework for the Assessment of Quality and Standards in Initial Teacher Training they explicitly recognise that mentors have been given the role of teacher educators. In the T cell is included a judgement that:

*Training sessions exemplify good teaching on the part of the trainers.* (TTA, 1998, p.8)

Unfortunately, and a driving factor underpinning this study, the ability of mentors to carry out this role in training to the Standards in the post-16 phase seems to vary enormously. No central prescription can cover the range of mentoring contexts, the variety of mentors and the heterogeneity of students. This is apparent from OfSTED reports on the distance learning PGCE secondary courses that provide the students, mentors and context for this study.

There may, of course, be difficulties with both the reliability and validity of an agenda of accountability based on a small decontextualised sample of observations of mentors wary of OfSTED incursions. However the reports pick up the vital role envisaged for mentors, finding some of the work carried out in schools to support the training of students problematic. Relevant concerns focussed on the quality of mentor training strategies observed in schools. Of particular interest to this study, in English (OfSTED, 1998a):

*A small number of trainees receive insufficient guided support from mentors on appropriate teaching methods.*  
(Point 12)

*Occasionally mentors are inexperienced and do not provide sound advice to trainees on how to improve, or they fail to challenge weaker aspects of training they have seen.* (Point 13)

This suggests a research agenda relevant to this study in which the quality of the guidance English mentors provide and the willingness to challenge weaknesses in student understanding and practice could be investigated through the post-16 teaching experience. Confirmation of the general appropriateness and relevance of such a study can also be established from comments in other subject inspections. In Mathematics for example (OfSTED, 1998b):



*Mentors are asked to challenge trainees to develop their practice beyond the standards required to achieve QTS. However, many mentors are unsure about how to interpret and carry out this requirement, because they do not share examples of successful approaches. (Point 17)*

And in Music (OfSTED, 1998c)

*Much more detailed comment is needed from mentors about how trainees can develop, improve and sustain their teaching skills, beyond merely describing trainees' practice at an adequate or a good level. This is encouraging some trainees to adopt stereotypes, rather than to explore a range of practical alternatives. (Point 24)*

The mentor role in training student teachers is presented as a vital one, but one in which a gap exists between rhetoric and practice. It is the intention of this study to highlight that gap in relation to post-16 teaching. The issues of relevance to the fieldwork would seem to be, that there is a need for clearer mentor training and enhanced quality assurance mechanisms. In addition, a hypothesis emerging would be that mentors might be deprofessionalised or deskilled by the additional burden of mentoring student teachers, and that pushing strategies to work specifically and more effectively with student teachers in their post-16 experience may be asking too much. Mentors are already under considerable work pressures and may have to “snatch” the time for mentoring (Dart and Drake, 1993). Being alert to the political context in which mentors are being asked to work will impact on the choice of research strategies, since sensitivity to particular demands being made on individual teachers will be necessary if the data gathered is to be meaningful.

Curriculum 2000, the first significant change to the A level curriculum for half a century (QCA, 1999) highlights greater flexibility for schools in offering combinations of academic and vocational study. The effect of this is to require

post-16 teachers to be more focussed on guiding pupils, and their colleagues, through the enhanced choice of academic and vocational courses available. While coming just as this study was ending, Curriculum 2000 does serve to emphasise the importance of mentors being able to engage with post-16 issues as they train their secondary student teachers. It is a reminder that post-16 is not a static area of a school's work.

It is the conflation of these two issues: post-16 teaching in schools and the mentoring of student teachers, that drives this research.

### **Post-16 teaching: a role for mentors?**

The political context in which post-16 teaching operates in secondary schools is of critical importance to this study. This goes beyond regulations affecting courses of Initial Teacher Training and into the domain of key values in education in England and Wales. The critical question affecting post-16 is: why do we have essentially a common curriculum and common assessment framework up to 16 and then have academic selection into high status A level courses post-16? How should student teachers interpret this shift in emphasis and embed it in their developing practice?

The issues around post-16 education are consistently demonstrated in the literature. The ongoing debates, for example, over specialisation versus breadth, underpin this study's phase specific focus. Implicitly, much of the literature endorses the powerful belief in a break in schooling at 16 as crucial. This is challenged from some quarters. Spours (1991) for example is an early advocate of a change to a 14-19 phase to provide comprehensive continuity and cohesion across academic and vocational curricula. However Hodkinson, (1998) recognises that, though a problem, a break at 16 is an institutional and structural reality.

A number of commentators remind us that post-16 schooling has been a contentious, ideologically driven battleground since the introduction of A levels

in 1951. Evidence for this assertion (Chitty, 1991, Lawton, 1992) is found in the attempts to broaden sixth form study, such as Schools Council (1970, 1973), and the Higginson Report, (DES, 1988), all of which failed to gain sufficient support. Recently, attempts have been made to provide a broader post-16 curriculum for the so called “new sixth” (Butcher, 1998) through developments like Certificate of Extended Education (CEE), Certificate of Pre-vocational Education (CPVE) and GNVQ. These developments, as Dearing (1996) confirmed, failed to threaten what some commentators regard as the hegemony of A levels.

According to Lawton (1992), the key policy vacuum created by the Education Reform Act (1988) was that left undone in relation to education and training 16-19. Firstly, the introduction of a common examination at 16 (GCSE) had implications for A level study which were not met (Whitbread, 1991). Breadth in the GCSE assessed at 16 was, and continues to be, in tension with academic specialism post-16. The former is not designed to prepare pupils for studying the latter, yet A levels remain inviolate. This view is echoed by Harland (1991), Richardson (1993) and Kershaw (1994). All four point to this as a missed opportunity to reform the curriculum and teaching methods post-16 to bring them more in line with pre-16. In this, little has seemed to change since 1970, when the difficulty of transfer from what was then fifth form to sixth was noted (Holt, 1978).

In view of the government’s commitment to what was presented to the rest of the world as a ‘gold standard’ in education, A level remained sacrosanct and politically and pedagogically separate from the rest of secondary schooling. The impact of the Dearing (1996) review is important here. Constrained to maintain the rigour of A levels by a government in thrall to the notion of academic excellence, an opportunity to broaden the post-16 curriculum was lost. Pound (1998) characterises the Dearing review as a conservative reform, which confirmed A level as the indisputable test of fitness for HE entry, in spite of the altered characteristics and changed context of 16-19 education over the previous 40 years. Responses to Dearing (Hodgson and Spours, 1997, Stanton

and Richardson, 1997) continued the focus on policy and curriculum frameworks rather than pedagogy, with only the latter including some recognition of the diverse needs of post-16 pupils.

Such thinking about the dominance of A levels in the post-16 curriculum in schools presents a valuable focus for this study, which seeks to illuminate what those GCSE/A level differences mean for student teachers' thinking and pedagogy, and what implications there are for mentoring.

Lawton's second concern is that A level was over-specialised, in being designed as a preparation for higher education. The Schools Examinations and Assessment Council described A level (quoted in Richardson, 1993, p. 2) as:

*A narrow academic orientation...overburdened with content...and an inadequate range of assessment methods.*

This is important because of the failure and withdrawal rates amongst sixth formers studying A levels (National Commission on Education, 1995), and the historical fact noted by Judge (1984) that many sixth formers were following courses designed for those going on to university but were completing full time education at the age of 18. My study is interested in uncovering evidence of mentors being able to mediate those content heavy A level syllabuses and offer guidance on appropriate strategies with which student teachers might tackle them.

In addition, Lawton noted that the Education Reform Act contributed nothing to solving the problem that the majority of 16 year olds left compulsory schooling with limited access to further education and training and that fewer school pupils enjoyed advanced level education in comparison to our international economic competitors. While such observations fall outside the immediate scope of this study, they provide an interesting backdrop to the hidden post-16 curriculum (see below) which mentors ought to discuss with their student teachers. This is particularly so given the 1990s were marked by a policy

rhetoric post-16 of parity of esteem between academic and vocational routeways. Yet Canning (1999) asserts that the more academically qualified will be favoured in employment over the vocationally qualified, and Eggleston (2000) claims the gatekeepers to post-16 schooling (Year 11 tutors) connive with school systems which seek to select who stays on and what they are offered, reflecting class and ethnic bias. These are aspects of a hidden post-16 curriculum which need to impact on the kind of explanations mentors offer their student teachers about the make-up of their post-16 classes, and without which novice teachers will be ill-prepared for the necessary planning for differentiation. Such issues are worth exploring in this research.

Lawton's final point is a significant one for this study. He notes that barriers between A levels and vocationally oriented programmes ensured hermetically sealed and inflexible systems. This amplifies the concern over separating out pupils, educated comprehensively, into twin streams (academic and vocational) post-16. The adherence to a system of separate pathways post-16 has been challenged from a series of positions. Payne (1991), drawing on a practitioner perspective engaged with curricular innovation post-16, criticised the system as it had developed in schools as being dominated by the status accorded to single subject specialist A levels. Most radically, IPPR, (1990) demanded an all encompassing British Baccalaureate to halt the academic/vocational divide. This would have had all post-16 pupils mixing academic and vocational modules in a common framework. Kershaw (1994) challenged the twin tracks as inequitable, but criticised the British Baccalaureate proposal as impractical. Such debate may have contributed to the eventual modification of post-16 structures in Curriculum 2000.

However, the increasing co-existence of post-16 academic courses and vocational programmes like CPVE, BTEC First or National Diploma, GNVQ at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced in secondary schools during the 1990s is one virtually untouched in the literature. An exception, Butcher (1998) claimed:

*Significant numbers of comprehensive and upper schools across the country are building on a tradition of previous involvement with vocational awarding bodies...this has resulted in enthusiastic take-up of GNVQ. (p.569)*

The general lack of interest in the literature may be explained by the continuing doubt as to whether vocational courses are proper activities for school sixth forms, even though it has been established that many comprehensive schools were waiting for real alternatives to A level for their 16 year olds (Sharp, 1997). Some of the pedagogical and structural issues related to this are covered in research publications on the FE sector, but they generally ignore what was developing in secondary schools. The resultant danger is that ITT is left promulgating a single subject discipline model of teaching post-16, which appears to be an outdated and increasingly irrelevant one for today's schools. The issues raised in preparing student teachers adequately for the breadth of courses on offer post-16 is one this study seeks to uncover.

The current political issues that impinge on post-16 schooling have informed this study. In essence, they are about the need to broaden the post-16 curriculum, to improve access to post-16 education, to introduce new skills and to achieve these without threatening standards. The explicit difference between student teachers training in pre-16 classrooms and post-16 classrooms is in the dissimilarity of curriculum content, assessment methods and teaching approaches they encounter. How mentors articulate this difference for their students is a question this study will seek to answer. The implicit difference is at the level of pupils: that student teachers need guidance from their mentors in understanding how have they been "selected" for their particular course and what effect might any limiting of access to post-16 opportunities for some of those pupils have on planning and differentiation?

The key theme emerging from scrutiny of the literature is that the preparation of student teachers with appropriate strategies to teach post-16 pupils is a neglected area. However, a few researchers recognise aspects of the problem.

Higham (1996) for example emphasises the narrow curriculum and the way courses are taught post-16 as issues which limit pupil opportunities. Watts and Young (1997) stress the need for policy which reconnects with pedagogy post-16, rather than ignoring issues of how young adults learn. Higham et al (2001) conclude that the bottom line to raise standards 16-19 is good quality teaching, rather than politicised debates about curriculum frameworks or assessment methods post-16. These issues will inform the research design by providing a context for the questions being asked of students and mentors.

One of the few extended analyses is contained within a book devoted more to 16-19 policy (Macfarlane, 1993). He expresses concern that with the dominance of A levels, pedagogy stultifies in the post-16 sector. He feels this situation owes more to expediency than ideology, with strong forces militating against the use of methods designed to foster pupil independence. Teachers in his study cited, in defence of didactic methods, overlarge classes, inadequate resources, insufficient time and the overloading of syllabuses. This is endorsed by Rainbow (1993) who relates a tendency to over teach at A level to what teachers perceived as successful chalk and talk methods offering no incentive to change.

Student teachers are increasingly confronted with a post-16 culture, in which the pressure is on “getting through the content” to achieve results. The implications for this are to undervalue teaching and learning processes post-16, and for students this could be profound. If mentors are unable to intervene in the information overload generated by content imperatives post-16, student teachers may be under pressure to accept a belief in teaching this phase as it has always been. This is important because of the evidence provided by researchers for the prevalent misunderstanding of the nature of teaching on both academic and vocational courses at this level in schools. There is reported a disparity between existing teacher perceptions and self-beliefs about a set of behaviours in the post-16 classroom, and the description of those behaviours as analysed by researchers.

Work based in English classrooms (Hardman and Williamson, 1998 and Hardman and Leat, 1998) describes a classroom discourse dominated by teacher talk and far removed from the perception teachers held of a seminar style dialogue of negotiated meanings. Assumptions that smaller groups of motivated post-16 pupils prompt different, discussion based teaching is rejected. The reliance on traditional models of teacher as expert transmitting a canon of wisdom in both literature and language classes belies the assumptions made by those same teachers about a democratic discussion focussed pedagogy. It suggest the perpetuation of an academic culture, resistant to change and raises a host of issues with which mentors should engage.

It would seem that lack of sufficient attention to the particular demands of post-16 teaching within a course of secondary Initial Teacher Training could be damaging to the student, and unhelpful to the mentor charged with ensuring the novice is competent to teach across the 11-18 range. This is highlighted by the work of Harkin (1998, 1999 and Davis, 1996, and Turner, 1997) which describes post-16 pupils encountering teaching methods which give little attention to the needs of the learner. These studies reveal a paucity of the kind of enabling pupil-centred discourse which teachers claim to value, and believe they engage in. In addition, it is suggested pupils are aware of the teacher centred approach they are being exposed to, and crave an open, more mature approach. Such affectivity (warmth is particularly mentioned as a desirable post-16 teacher attribute) would involve real dialogue, not monologue. Significantly, reference is made to the link between perceived quality of teaching and retention rates on GNVQ. One aim for this research will be to establish if student teachers are taught how to work with pupils following vocational courses, and whether this impacts on their thinking about pedagogy.

However, this is not an unproblematic area. Macfarlane (1993) attests to the comfort zone of didactic teaching post-16, allowing a teacher set piece presentations perfected over a number of years, attuned to unchanging assessment procedures at A level. This he contrasts with fluid, unpredictable teaching situations on vocational courses if pupils are put at the centre of the



learning process, calling for classroom and management skills of the highest order. This tension is confirmed by Dillon (1994) who laments the lack of training received by teachers in facilitating and leading classroom discussion.

Any omission or underplaying of training specific to the needs of post-16 teaching would seem to be a problem in ITT. An important question for this research is how adequately are new teachers prepared for their post-16 teaching? Other studies discuss potential shifts in emphasis in relation to a pedagogy of guidance 14-19 (Lucas, 1997), and the need for multi-disciplinary flexibility in post-16 teachers applying knowledge (Bloomer, 1997). The latter reminds us that post-16 planners are bereft of a significant history of classroom research and hence knowledge of post-16 pupil experience is taken for granted. If this is true, it is a serious gap which needs to be plugged so that post-16 teaching can be more clearly understood and more effectively developed.

Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) intriguingly found little difference in teaching strategies across the academic/vocational divide in college settings, but suggested that pupils found ways of adapting to what was offered. Young and Lucas (1999) might explain the former description by noting the borrowing of pedagogic approaches in integrated programmes, and that, relevant to school settings, many post-16 staff teach on more than one type of programme. They also emphasise the split between didactic traditions in subject knowledge driven A level teaching, and process learning, guided or facilitated by a teacher, in pre-vocational work. For the purpose of this study, it will be important to investigate the awareness amongst student teachers and their mentors of different pedagogic traditions between A level and vocational teaching.

It would seem there is much for students and mentors to engage with post-16: the pedagogical shift from GCSE to A level or vocational teaching; the need to manage content-heavy A levels, differentiation within courses claiming parity of esteem while selecting pupils differently and the assumption that post-16 is only about single subject specialist teaching.

A review of mentoring literature ought to reveal what mentors actually do in relation to these issues. Scrutiny of library databases reveals general mentoring is well represented in the research literature. Over the last decade it would be only a slight exaggeration to suggest there has been a mania in educational publishing devoted to mentoring as a systematised aspect of teacher training. A similar burgeoning of interest can be discerned in related areas like nurse education, personnel and human resource management and careers counselling (Clutterbuck, 1991, Shea, 1992, Hamilton, 1993, Fisher, 1994). The range of contributions to the journal *Mentoring and Tutoring* includes perspectives on mentoring in the police force and social services as well as education and nursing.

While much work on mentoring has been uncritical and prescriptive (Fairbanks, et al 2000), with mentoring thinly conceptualised, a number of key issues and recurring themes can be distinguished.

The first problem for teachers charged with mentoring ITT students is that mentoring itself is reported as being unclear (Williams et al, 1998), a quagmire of confusion over people, processes and activities (Roberts, 2000) and ill defined, often operating at an intuitive level (Dunne and Bennett, 1997). Consequently, mentoring is hit and miss, with busy mentors using their limited time on organisational and administrative demands (Haggarty, 1995b) or else engaging in the training of students which is arbitrary and idiosyncratic (Reid and Jones, 1997). Crucially, this results in a reality gap between what mentors are actually able to do and the goals of ITT programmes (McNally and Martin, 1998). It also means ambiguity about their role disconnects mentors from HE input with a resultant unwillingness to take opportunities to share ideas with their students. (Martin, 1997).

Second, no one model of mentoring is in existence (Furlong and Maynard, 1995) and mentoring is described as a multiplicity of roles (Williams, 1993, Gay and Stephenson, 1998) with untidy overlaps, and still in transition (Martin, 1996). As students now spend longer in schools than previously, working to a

common ITT curriculum and to common NQT standards, mentoring ought to be grounded and enacted as teacher education rather than supervision. But the absence of a consensus on the role means the complexities have resulted in diverse variation, reliant on a mentor's own interpretation, and a consequent lack of confidence in the role for some. This might be explained by the idea that mentoring in ITT is a manifestation of ideologies informing a political and cultural context, so the educative function is underconceptualised and students might only be "acculturated" (Whitehead, 1995) in their partner school. This danger is perhaps more prevalent on a distance learning training course, when students have fewer face-to-face contacts with other students.

Third, mentoring is criticised as little more than a slogan (Colley, 2000), suffering from merely anecdotal evaluation (Piper and Piper, 2000). There is a considerable lack of understanding of how mentors "guide the seeing" (Maynard and Furlong, 1995) of students through the stages of professional growth identified by Berliner (1994). It is possible mentors help their students idiosyncratically within a complex relationship in which the potential for difficulty is high (Hawkey, 1997). Clearly, not one model of mentoring has impacted as superseding all others, and indeed practitioners are encouraged to select appropriate strategies from all models on offer, (Brooks and Sikes, 1997).

Much work on mentoring in ITT in the earlier part of the last decade was relatively uncritical, offering prescriptions for teachers in the new ITT partnerships (e.g Wilkin, 1992, McIntyre et al, 1993, Field and Field, 1994, Wilkin and Sankey, 1994). Other studies from this period looked at the management of mentoring, (Smith and West-Burnham, 1993, Watkins and Whalley, 1993, Glover and Mardle, 1995) or provided practical tips for mentors, (Furlong and Maynard, 1995, McIntyre and Hagger, 1996). The imposition of a competency framework (DFE, 1992), against which students had to be assessed in schools, also impacted on the literature produced (Smith, 1992, Hagger et al, 1993).

The problem here is that novices are not passive inert receivers of advice and guidance, they are in a dynamic and fluid relationship with their mentor (Jacques, 1995). Prescribing what mentors should do in their training is not the same as starting from individual learners' needs. It is likely that the impact of Circular 9/92 took a while to reverberate and for practical issues to surface, and as a consequence, writers were struggling to make sense of the explicit training dimension of the new mentor role (Martin, 1996).

More recent developments have seen an interest in the relationship between mentor activities and the development of subject knowledge (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997, Maynard, 1997). This parallels the increasing attention given to subject knowledge in the Standards. For the purpose of this study, using English to exemplify the particularities of subject specific mentoring is helpful. Goodwyn, (1997) for example, makes the case for the uniqueness of subject beliefs in English and proposes that mentors need to reflect on their training role with this in mind. Work on phase specific mentoring (Edwards and Collison, 1996) has also arisen as the focus in ITT has shifted from generic mentoring skills.

However, despite all the emphasis in the literature that the expectation in ITT is that teachers are no longer expected to merely supervise, to "keep an eye on" students (Hawkey, 1998a), we are still allegedly unclear what and how students learn from their mentors (Stanulis and Russell, 2000).

It is noteworthy that none of this profusion of ITT mentoring literature analyses the specific needs of students in the post-16 classroom, or strategies mentors might use in relation to post-16 teaching. If there is as yet no clearly accepted definition of what a mentor in ITT does to facilitate the learning of student teachers, there are important implications for the post-16 context of my study. First, this disables mentors from mentoring with confidence and leaves them reliant on their own individualised resources. They have to prioritise, and this means post-16 may be sidelined in relation to the more immediate concerns of classroom management 11-16. Second, how can the participants in the research

share a consistent conception of mentor processes and purposes? One solution will be to incorporate a conception synthesised from the literature into my research questions and to make it explicit in the research. This will highlight the post-16 context.

### **Mentoring conceptualised as support and challenge**

A key starting point for much of the discussion of mentoring in the literature is a conceptualisation drawn from Daloz (1986) which frames the mentoring role as one requiring strategies of both support and challenge, in which the mentor has a vision of where the student is going. The element of challenge is distinctive, originating in Daloz's work as a notion of cognitive dissonance, a gap in the student's understanding of their own teaching practice, a gap prompted by the mentor creating tension in order for the student to reach closure, without settling for superficial and ephemeral knowledge. Daloz draws on the notion of an adult learner being guided through a transition by a mentor, using an image of a mirror being tilted by the mentor, with the mentor themselves proof that the transition can be made. In this context, mentor support, exemplified by affirmation and empathy, creates trust. A relationship established on trust allows the mentor to introduce challenge, through which preconceptions can be peeled apart and tacit assumptions questioned.

The supportive element of mentoring is presented as: listening; providing structure; expressing positive expectations as a vision of what is possible and making the relationship special. Daloz suggests female mentors, favouring honest, open, nurturant stances, are better at this. This is interesting, because of the possible effect of "gendered mentoring" on judgements that are made about students. For example, Drake and Dart (1997) provocatively question whether mentors ever recognise charisma in female students.

Male mentors allegedly find challenge easier, tossing insights into students' paths like "cowplops on the road to truth" (Daloz, 1986, p.223). Students are invited by mentors to entertain alternatives, to think afresh. Challenge is

presented as: the setting of tasks; engaging in discussion; taking opposite perspectives; constructing hypotheses and setting high standards. The latter is intended as a self-fulfilling prophecy, to challenge students to challenge themselves. This takes place in the context of the mentor's vision of where the student is going, which is modelled, mapped and mirrored with new language suggested.

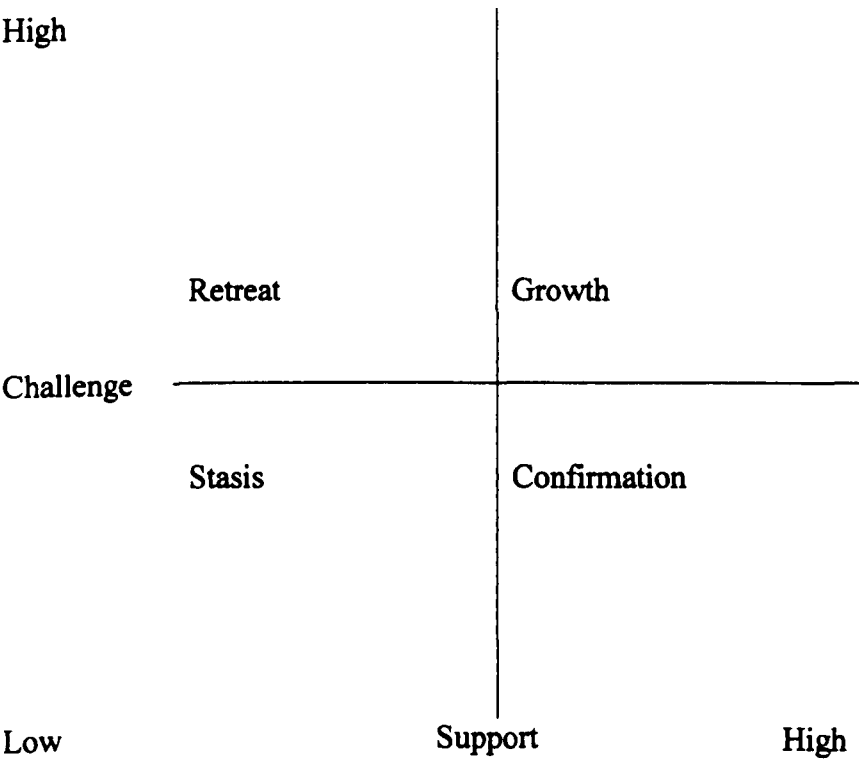
This idea of challenge has been influential in the subsequent studies, and is important in separating out mentoring from purely a nurturing, befriending, sponsoring or supervisory role to one which includes intervention in forcing student teachers to question their own, often simplistic assumptions about teaching. The Open University (1995) presented mentoring as multi-faceted. In this conceptualisation, challenge was advocated as one strategy which mentors might use to extend student development from one stage of professional growth to the next. McNamara (1995) advocates that mentors use challenge to move students beyond the reproduction of well-worn teaching routines. Smith (1998) considers the introduction of a critical dialogue between mentor and student, so that contrast and challenge at appropriate stages helps students make sustainable progress beyond a basic level of teaching competence.

Other researchers (e.g Calderhead and Robson, 1991, Cochran-Smith, 1991, Smyth, 1995, Adey, 1997), formulate challenge as a mentor strategy which provides a means towards shared goals, by provoking reflective learning and discouraging taken-for-granted passivity. However, just as many researchers stress that professional growth and development can only take place in an environment in which support is also present. The relationship between the two is regarded as a delicate one. Stanulis and Russell (2000) suggest challenge without support will cause withdrawal. In fact effective mentoring as conceptualised by Daloz requires high levels of both support and challenge, with feedback instrumental in providing both. Challenge is also premised on appropriateness, in being pitched at a relevant degree for the needs of the student teacher. This is an important element to inform my research questions,

raising as it does the notion of active mentoring in a post-16 context according to need.

For Martin (1996), the framework proposed by Daloz provides a generic underlying principle for effective mentoring, but she recognises that challenge is somewhat neglected in subsequent mentor prescriptions and descriptions. She envisages mentor support as affirmation, often signified by listening. She too conceptualises challenge as the setting of tasks, the introduction of conflicting ideas, the questioning of assumptions, the taking of an opposite stance as devil’s advocate in order to promote discussion. Similarly Zanting (2001) presents support as mentor confirmation of a student’s ideas or practice, whereas challenge is more evaluative, based on questioning. In both cases, the mentor is making an explicit attempt to move the student forward.

Figure 2.1  
Daloz’s model of mentoring relationships



The balance between support and challenge for Daloz can be represented by four quadrants, which correspond to four varieties of mentor/student relationships. With little support and little challenge, the student is unlikely to make progress. This can be characterised as hands-off mentoring with a student left to fend for themselves in an ad hoc way. Challenge without support is likely to result in the student withdrawing or retreating as trust has not been established between mentor and student. Support without challenge seems to confirm the status quo, with a student unlikely to perceive any need to change or move on in their development. Such a mentor has effectively taken on a counselling rather than a training role. Support combined with challenge is most likely to lead to student growth.

However, Martin (1996) rightly points out that categories of support and challenge are arbitrary and context dependent, since a student's perception of being supported in one setting might be perceived as challenge in another. The key, though, seems to be in the idea of vision, the mentor's idea of where the student's growth as a novice teacher is going. This enables expectations to be set appropriate to the student's needs. If vision of the professionally competent and reflective teacher is characterised as the end, support and challenge provide the means by which the mentor trains the student to reach that end.

Such propositions raise a number of questions. First, is a student only receptive to challenge when confident in their own minimal competence? This would imply that support must be in place first. It may be that in practice there is a preponderance of support early in the relationship with challenge coming later. Second, if challenge as a mentor strategy acts as a trigger to prompt reflection, would an internal trigger be less threatening than an external one? If so, can students be trained by their mentors to challenge themselves? This suggests mentor use of development targets formulated via student self evaluation and thus, importantly, carrying no implication of criticism. Third, does the tension between a student's attempt to survive lesson-to-lesson on teaching practice and a mentor's longer term vision of that student's development suggest challenge as a strategy carries with it considerable risks?



When challenge is described as a mentor taking a student beyond mere survival, stimulating them to talk about decisions and actions (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1987) it sounds relatively risk free. When it is suggested mentors provide alternative ways of thinking (Calderhead and Shorrocks, 1997) or make systematic, carefully timed interventions (Furlong and Maynard, 1995) challenge sounds practicable. And when it is proposed effective mentors stimulate their students to leave a plateau by setting targets in a context of reassurance, (Fletcher, 2000) we are reminded that challenge and support are inseparable in best mentor practice.

What emerges as a tenable model of mentor support and challenge is described in McNally and Martin (1998). They advocate the integration of challenge strategies into mentor target setting in the context of formative assessment, provided there are opportunities for the student to discuss any issues. This has the benefit of getting students to think regularly about their teaching effectiveness as part of their ongoing development. Although a valuable notion, there are still pitfalls reported in mentor practice. While the mentors in this study recognised the importance of challenge, they admitted to being less proactive than they would have liked to have been, because they found it easier to respond to student initiatives. What also emerged of interest was a suggestion that good students tended to challenge themselves, while weaker students needed more mentor challenge, but were only responsive if some level of success had already been achieved. This idea will be examined through this study.

From their research, McNally and Martin categorise three types of mentors. The “laissez-faire” mentor nurtures and supports, aiming to reduce the stress of learning to teach by being reactive and non-interventionist. But with no mirror of critical reflection, students have to challenge themselves to go beyond minimum competency. The “imperial” mentor, in contrast, is interventionist, presenting strong views about teaching but offering little support. Most effective are the “collaborative” mentors, who combine support and challenge

to empower students as they learn to teach. They are proactive in exhorting students to take responsibility for their own targets, and are likely to be more experienced as mentors, allowing their students to take risks in collegial departments. Such a typology offers an intriguing framework for this research, since the post-16 focus may serve to magnify the significance of the approaches taken to mentoring, illuminating whether mentors are hands-off, dogmatic or collaborative.

Four further points are raised in the literature which are relevant to the focus of this research. It is alleged challenge is most likely to be an effective strategy in a school environment in which professional debate and challenge are the norm. It is also asserted that students are more likely to be prompted to reflect if there is a mismatch between their own and their mentor's views (Elliott and Calderhead, 1995). It is suggested that the dominance of intense support described by mentors and their students might blot out any perception of challenge on the part of the student, even if it was present in their mentor's strategies (Cameron-Jones and O'Hara, 1997). Interestingly, a further proposal is that all students may eventually need challenging directly, but that mentors need to get the whole picture before deciding the appropriate level and detail of challenge, and it would be most effective if this formed part of active mentor support in a developing skills cycle (Tomlinson, 1995). These ideas of integrating challenge into mentor practice are relevant to this research and are explored in this fieldwork.

The problem with a definition of mentoring involving support and challenge is that it does not necessarily take account of how student teachers learn from their mentors. The literature does not establish a clear model, but the various studies raise interesting questions for any study of mentoring processes. Student teacher learning is described as being distorted by non-ITT factors, and in relation to their mentors, as happening by osmosis (Hagger, 1995). What student teachers learn from their mentors is unpredictable (Haggarty, 1995a) and too often covering aims but not means (Saunders et al, 1995). Mentor feedback can also be misperceived (Stark, 1994). Mentor support for learning

(Edwards and Collison, 1996) can be related to the notion of mentoring as assisted performance (Feiman-Nemser and Beasley, 1997) in which active participation is the key. Ideally, the mentor acts as guide and coach in the process of knowledge building, so both participants utilise knowledge to clarify practical applications (Slaats et al, 1999). However, with insufficient guidance this learning can be unregulated. The aim of the mentoring relationship is conjoined understanding, reached by real talk which is recognised as honest transformative dialogue rather than polite chit-chat (Cochran-Smith and Paris, 1995).

A lack of clarity and agreement about how student teachers learn is perhaps a helpful validation for this study. Student teacher learning seems to be idiosyncratic, but dependent upon reciprocity in mentor discussion. For student teachers encountering post-16 teaching, engagement with their mentor can be analysed in this study for the first time.

This research will incorporate the idea of challenge as a mentor strategy appropriate to the needs of student teachers engaged in learning how to teach post-16. For mentors, the use of challenge could illuminate the hidden post-16 curriculum for their students. Challenge could enable the post-16 experience, a peripheralised and ad hoc aspect of ITT, to become part of mainstream training. This would then be more likely to have some impact on opening up debates about teaching standards in post-16 classes and could eventually lead to improvements.

In this study, challenge is seen as a discourse in which a mentor can model, guide, advise and question their student teacher in a collaborative context. A discourse of challenge (Burgess and Butcher, 1999), in the supportive environment of either department or school operating as a site for student teacher learning, could trigger high quality engagement with post-16 teaching issues. Mentoring in this way can become a transformative role (McIntyre et al, 1994) rather than a confirming and conforming one. This can be uncomfortable, but if undertaken in a spirit of co-operative support (Aaronsohn, 1996, Portner,

1998) can enable active interventions (Tomlinson, 1995) which develop more effective teachers.

This would require the post-16 classroom to become a productive site of enquiry (Graham, 1997) rather than a hidden garden in which mentors dare not go. Once opened up, student teachers are then likely to feel more confident, and be able to demonstrate their competence, with improved understanding of what makes for effective post-16 teaching. For this reason, this study will investigate challenge as a mentor strategy.

However, this is not an unproblematic undertaking. Although support and challenge are considered by many researchers to be vital elements of mentoring, in studies which have sought to show what actually occurs in mentoring relationships, challenge has been notable by its absence. In one study (Elliott and Calderhead, 1995), mentors are reported as perceiving themselves as guides/leaders or friends/enablers, listening actively, providing support as a sounding board but uncomfortable challenging the ideas of novice teachers. There was no critical orientation, apart from one solitary mentor in their study who deliberately took on an agent provocateur role. The remainder possessed only a limited language with which to challenge their student teacher's professional thinking.

In another study (Jacques, 1995), mentors are reported as reluctant to talk to students about the difficulties they were having, behaviour characterised by the researcher as both parties collaborating in a conspiracy of silence. Similarly, Tomlinson, (1995) reports mentors who wished to avoid being seen as confrontational, yet whose students craved help to overcome their difficulties.

These are important points. If mentors see their role only as supporter or encourager, the notion of challenge will not be at the forefront of their minds. If support is perceived as positive, whereas challenge is perceived as critical and judgmental, and confused with the assessment role which for them is irreconcilable with their support role (Martin, 1996), mentors will be unwilling

to adopt a critical orientation in their role. The problem seems to be that mentors interpret challenge differently, and some fear it as threatening the dependant relationship (Hawkey, 1997). For other mentors, avoidance of challenge results in them being underdemanding and ill-prepared to respond to individual students' needs (McIntyre and Hagger, 1994).

One theory is that mentors view teaching by students as a performance, and thus tend to talk about episodes, superficial content issues in the "product" as observed (Zanting, 2001). Mentors then miss the learning opportunity afforded to talk about principles, to see teaching as a process in which experiential learning can be stimulated by alternative actions. It is significant that mentors in her study did not challenge students to think critically, even though students expected this from their mentors. The training problem is compounded when students are reported as being disinclined to ask questions about a mentor's lessons.

Of course there are other factors. Some mentors studied (Benton, 1990) lacked the time to initiate, and wanted their students to take more responsibility for the training. And even if students wanted mentors who could focus sharply on issues and articulate their own practice clearly, Booth (1995) reported they were reluctant to look back on their own work with a critical eye.

Further evidence for this avoidance of challenge is provided by Edwards, who characterises mentors as carers rather than challengers (1995) and who reports school cultures in which challenge is perceived as a negative, interfering activity (Edwards and Collison, 1996, Edwards and Ogden, 1998). This is confirmed in the work of Campbell and Jacques, (1998) and Gratch, (1998), suggesting mentoring remains in the affective area of support rather than the cognitive development domain. Jones, (1994), in a close analysis of mentor/mentee interaction, described a student wanting a challenging discussion but the mentor engaging at only a perfunctory level. Haggarty, (1995a) describes the mask of mentor politeness which ensures disagreements are unexplored or ignored. Like others, Veenman et al (1998), observes plenty

of mentor support but no challenge. One reason is attested as the workload of mentors (Hoye, 1996) with a suggestion that challenge is simply unfeasible in the context in which they work. Others report the intensity of the mentor/student relationship which precludes challenge (Smart, 1994) or that mentors lack the time to reflect on their own strategies (Kerry and Farrow, 1996).

Exploration of the absence of challenge, and if so the reasons for it, will need to form part of this study.

What is serious about the inability or unwillingness of mentors to challenge is the consequent persistence of firmly held, outdated or inappropriate student preconceptions and beliefs about teaching.

*Prospective teachers preserve their beliefs as they go through teacher education programmes, while teacher educators often intend to challenge them. (Bird et al, 1993, p. 253)*

Some studies (e.g Powell, 1992, Bramald et al, 1995,) describe student teachers' sometimes idealised notions about teaching. This may be particularly true of student teacher beliefs about post-16 teaching, which they have experienced successfully as pupils and which may segue into memories of undergraduate study. This raises important questions about the extent to which mentors are able or willing to challenge those beliefs.

In addition, Elliott and Calderhead (1995) note the importance of student teacher images of their own learning and development. This is based on their experiences as pupils, drawing on what teachers had been seen to do, rather than the teacher thinking behind the actions. It follows that the mentor role should be to prompt students to confront, acknowledge and adapt these images. This is interesting in relation to post-16 teaching, for if the approach students remember and value, and through which they achieved, is a highly academic, teacher dominated and spoon-fed one, there are issues to explore in my research

questions. Do mentors understand and use this facet of novice teacher development, and do they recognise the image of post-16 teaching the student brings with them? For this study, unpicking student teacher perceptions about how they see themselves learning to teach post-16 will be important.

This is a significant point in relation to post-16 teaching, since without mentor help in understanding and adjusting this image, students might resort to pragmatic, conforming survival. (Hawkey, 1996). It is also important that mentors are informed in their training role by an understanding of the incoming beliefs of their students, which may often be little more than a loosely formulated philosophy of education to explain what teachers do and how pupils learn. Complexities can then be clarified by mentors taking a contrasting viewpoint (Hollingsworth, 1989). This kind of challenge might prevent students reinventing their own experience of post-16 teaching.

Three outstanding points remain around a review of the literature on mentor challenge strategies. First, if mentors generally are unwilling or unable to challenge in their training role, professional isolation from other mentors and any discourse of challenge may be partly to blame. This issue could be addressed by mentor support groups or mutual mentoring (Stanulis and Russell, 2000) as well as a concerted effort by policy makers and HE partners to facilitate the widening of mentor horizons beyond their immediate school context (Reid and Jones, 1997). Second, if students generally are having to find things out for themselves in the absence of any challenge from mentors, it would be better if they were trained to be enquiry orientated in order to draw out their mentor's practical knowledge (Zanting, 2001). Third, any analysis of challenge as used by a mentor must recognise the difficult issue of the power relationship between mentor and student (Stanulis and Russell, 2000). These points will underpin the approach taken in the fieldwork.

## **English: an exemplification of the need for mentoring post-16**

*There can be no doubt that English is one of the most politically and philosophically contentious, professionally controversial and personally opinionated areas of the curriculum. (Goodwyn, 1997, p.47)*

English is an intriguing topic for investigation in the context of post-16 teaching, because it represents arguably the most contested subject ideology amongst practitioners in schools. Students tend to enter English teaching with a passionate love of literature, yet the model of English they encounter in schools represents what Goodwyn (1997) calls an antithesis between models of cultural heritage and personal growth, complicated by an emergent model of cultural analysis. This is encapsulated in the belief that working with literature helps the individual, and attention to language empowers pupils. As a result, students can confuse intention and purpose in their thinking. Being a student of English does not necessarily mean the same thing to many people. The personal and subjective elements associated with English means it lacks uniformity as a subject.

English has also been prey to government diktat in a number of areas of compulsory education (for example the imposition of the National Literacy Strategy, or the use of standard English in the National Curriculum). This suggests the subject can be perceived to have been in crisis for the last 20 years, principally over what counts as knowledge, what attitudes and values are embedded in the subject and who has control of the literary canon. English, according to Goodwyn (1997), is a subject that shows no sign of “settling down” for some time yet, or perhaps ever. This in itself offers potentially fertile ground for mentor/student teacher engagement in the debates, as well as potential disagreement in the interpretation of competency based assessment. Post-16 could be perceived as the area still offering teacher autonomy, and hence could provide the opportunity for challenging discourse in Initial Teacher Training.



The problematic nature of defining English (Dart and Drake, 1996) for the purposes of this study is fuelled by a schism between advocates of two extremes. At one end are those teacher mentors trained in and adhering to a Leavisite paradigm of cultural heritage promoted by key texts and close personal response. At the other end are those teacher mentors working within a critical, cultural studies model drawn from Linguistics. At post-16, where teachers have retained some limited power in choice of text, and where pedagogy is less affected by the need to keep control, this potential for heartfelt discussion and disagreement is more exposed.

One question might be: what happens if a Leavisite mentor, often head of department, espousing canonical response to great literature in a transmission model, is working with an assured student with their own strongly held subject ideologies from a deconstructionist theoretical background? What happens if the student plans a lesson on constructing meanings by active engagement with a media text? The differing philosophies could lead to differing interpretations of the Standards, expressed in differing subject discourses and even possible failure. Such English departmental cultures are contextualised in relation to these subject debates in Arthur et al (1997). They suggest prime potential for a discourse of challenge.

It has also been reported (Drake and Dart, 1997) that any firmly held beliefs about the subject that mentors hold need to be shared with, and made explicit, to the student. In the example they quote, a mentor and a student had a complete disagreement over the student's attitude in the post-16 classroom and subsequently how she was assessed. As a result she had to be moved to another school. The problem centred on the student's alleged failure to make overt her love of literature in post-16 classes, and thus to enthuse pupils in a way which the mentor judged important in relation to the Standards. This suggests a need for mentors to articulate their beliefs and values about English, in order to deliberately make their students think through their own positions, beliefs and values.

However, Davies (1993, 1997) provides evidence of English mentors' reluctance to engage in discussion about the nature of English itself, even when prompted by student teachers. This teacher training issue is endorsed by research in America (Graham, 1997) which describes the competing philosophies in an English classroom between student teacher and mentor, leading to secondary teacher isolation caused by conflict over content area identities. For student teachers and mentors in this study, the potential conflict is further exacerbated by OfSTED possessing a fixed view of the kind of ITT curriculum that English PGCE students should follow (OFSTED, 1998a) which may or may not coincide with mentor perceptions of the subject.

In Dart and Drake (1996) the mismatch between student teachers' pre-PGCE English subject experience, including the kind of literature studied and valued, and mentors' perception of the subject influenced by syllabus choices is problematised. In their research, student teachers are reported as tending to fall back on their own experience as learners, culminating at worse as an uncritically espoused love of literature:

*Intending teachers already have an implicit sense of what is expected for teaching their particular subject and they often seek for it to be confirmed in the school in which they train...without the appropriate support it is easy to see how students will fall back on their own experience as learners of their subject and not implement any subject innovations. (pp 57-58)*

It would be too simplistic to identify English teachers with a Leavisite attitude as favouring a didactic pedagogy, and those immersed in cultural analysis as favouring a constructivist generation of pupil knowledge. However, as Arthur et al (1997) claim, a student teacher's view of English will inevitably impact on choice of pedagogy. Looking for support and modelling of effective practice

from their mentor, they are likely to find, as Bloomer (1997) describes, the greatest variation in pedagogic practices between A level English teachers.

Consequently, of considerable interest to this study is the work of Daw (1996) on the factors contributing to academically successful A level English teaching. These include: the subject expertise of staff; the commitment of staff; the balance of teaching methods; pupil experience of challenging English teaching at KS4; teacher recognition of the depth of knowledge required to introduce texts with confidence; and departments which do not assume all teachers could automatically teach at this level without support and training. He also notes the importance of pupils' cultural capital, whether gained from school or home. These all provide useful pointers towards research questions, but of particular significance as a question to be asked in this research is his concern that the less gifted post-16 pupils suffer if teacher expectations are not sufficiently differentiated.

What seems to be missing from Daw's list is the importance of understanding pupil perspectives on learning in a post-16 English teacher's armoury. This is corrected by Harkin (1998, 1999) who provides evidence of what post-16 pupils value: autonomy, although Mitchell (1994) describes a Leavisite definition of the successful English A level candidate as possessing attributes like intuition and flashes of insight. Whatever sort of English pupils a student encounters, the debate over pedagogy in the post-16 English classroom is one worthy of closer scrutiny, and one offering mentors and student teachers opportunity for dialogue if they choose to take it. This is particularly important given that on this particular English PGCE, the only course materials directly related to teaching post-16 were activities from five practitioners on introducing Shakespeare to sixth formers.

Also pertinent is the gender imbalance amongst pupils choosing specific A level subjects (Watson et al, 1994), with boys opting for sciences and girls for English and associated "literary" studies. Such gender inequalities have remained constant in A level over the period 1970 to 1995, despite the

introduction of a common curriculum in GCSE (Brown, 2001). The implication for student teachers who are otherwise working in co-educational 11-16 classes is worthy of further exploration. As part of this study, I will be interested to discover if mentors and student teachers engage in discussion about appropriate pedagogic strategies for single sex or gender imbalanced classes post-16

In Goodwyn (1997), the only book length study currently devoted to the mentor role for developing English teachers, the case is made for English mentors to reflect back on their own difficult and stressful experience of teacher education, often with a recognition of how under-prepared they felt, and to utilise this as a resource to establish common ground with the mentee. It will be interesting to discover if these open strategies are in operation amongst the sample selected for this study. His work does not explicitly advocate challenge as a specific mentor strategy, but rather questions whether mentors are able to manage the inevitable difficulties the student teacher encounters.

He also questions whether mentors are able to judge the right level of challenge. The intriguing answer he gives is that most English departments find intelligently critical student teachers a valuable stimulus to current practice. There is endorsement for the way mentors can use the Standards from an early stage to engage in developing conversation, in other words as a diagnostic element to help build understanding. The potential value for this study lies in the description of English departments as ripe contexts for mentor/student teacher dialogue, and hence possible locations for challenge.

OU PGCE English students and their school-based mentors share a background in some areas of English, and a professional aim of teaching their subject as effectively as possible. In the post-16 phase, the subject knowledge differences and the differing notions of what it means to teach effectively might be significant. Consequently, the intention behind this research is to understand and analyse the unique beliefs and behaviours of both in the context of school-based training. I am anxious to move beyond a simplistic caricature of active mentor and passive mentee (or indeed vice versa) to illuminate student teacher

needs and the extent to which, and the process by which, mentors are able to meet those needs in relation to post-16 teaching.

In addition, the case for the importance of mentors engaging with post-16 issues with their student teachers is inadvertently emphasised by Redford (2000). She outlined the changes to the new specifications for English AS and A levels introduced as a result of Curriculum 2000. She describes new criteria and assessment objectives (and new terminology) common to all four awarding bodies and teachers having to learn to assess coursework according to new criteria and at the different AS and A2 levels. Organising the subject into three AS modules in year 1 and three A2 modules in year 2, all of which can be assessed in January or June each year poses interesting challenges for English departments. Coursework elements on the five English Language and Literature, six English Literature and five English Language specifications offer considerable flexibility to teachers. Matters could be further complicated in those schools offering the Intermediate GNVQ or the six unit vocational A level in Media: Communications and Production (formerly Advanced GNVQ), to say nothing of the potential role for post-16 English teachers in Key Skills (UCAS, 2000).

Student teachers have no need to be intimate in their understanding of how departments choose to organise post-16 study opportunities. However, neither would it seem helpful to let student teachers loose on post-16 teaching blissfully unaware of any of the decisions that have been made about what is on offer in their classes. This study will seek to establish what the students are informed about, and whether that is considered sufficient to enable them to be effective post-16 English teachers.

## **Conclusion**

This review has concentrated on the broad themes integral to this study, and a number of conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it would seem that post-16 teaching in schools is a problematic aspect of ITT. Standards for the award of

QTS 11-18 explicitly depend on students demonstrating competence in post-16 teaching, and courses leading to this qualification are inspected against a framework including evidence of sufficient experience of the post-16 dimension. There can be no avoiding the fact that students should be incorporating post-16 teaching into their development as novice teachers. Alongside this, successive policies have made very clear the importance attached to the mentor role in training students in school. Mentors are envisaged as the prime resource in helping students to learn to teach. It would appear from such evidence that the mentor role in working with students on their post-16 teaching is a vital component of effective training towards the Standards.

The problem is that the literature on mentor strategies in ITT omits any analysis of what is effective in the post-16 phase. Assumptions seem to be made that the issues students encounter post-16 are exactly congruent with and indistinguishable from those pre-16. Training specific to the needs of the post-16 phase is thus invisible. This is perhaps unsurprising when it is evident that much of the literature devoted to post-16 in schools analyses curriculum and assessment issues rather than appropriate pedagogical strategies. What is missing, and it is a significant omission for schools under government pressure to improve results post-16, is any underlying encouragement for mentors to plan the training of their students with post-16 strategies recognised as a significant need. These needs are exemplified by the issues that have emerged in this review: the significance of a break in schooling at 16; the status of A levels as a gold standard; the over-specialised nature of A levels premised on preparation for HE; the gatekeeping role of schools in sorting Year 12 pupils into academic sheep and vocational goats; the dangers of a stultifying didactic pedagogy post-16 and the differing needs of learners across post-16. All of these can influence students as they plan to teach post-16.

If ITT has not recognised post-16 teaching as a discrete mentoring need, it is also apparent that mentoring in ITT is still not fully conceptualised, and that there is as yet little consensus on a valid model of mentoring. This is partly explained by the literature attesting to the idiosyncratic and unique nature of

each mentoring context. However, support and challenge emerge as potentially effective strategies for mentors to use, and they are the principal ideas underpinning this research into post-16 mentoring. Challenge in particular offers a way for mentors to be pro-active in their training with students learning to teach post-16. This is important when much of the literature describes an absence of challenge in the practice of mentoring. It is also notable that the literature on the significance of student teacher preconceptions of the role of the teacher suggests challenge is needed. This makes it especially relevant for any study of post-16 teaching in ITT, for preconceptions about post-16 appear particularly entrenched.

For the purpose of exemplifying the need for an active mentor role post-16, I have investigated English as a vehicle to explore the terrain of my argument. It emerges from the literature that English is a contentious subject, with divergent beliefs about its content and purpose amongst practitioners. Yet it is reported mentors tend not to voice these tensions with student teachers, despite enjoying the stimulus of intelligently critical students. Recent changes to the English curriculum post-16 are a valuable reminder of the variance in the subject post-16, and a reminder of the limited autonomy that post-16 English teachers still enjoy. At post-16, English mentors have much with which to challenge their students.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**



## **The rationale for case study**

The professional orientation of my doctoral research, seeking both to contribute to knowledge in an original way and to enhance my own professional practice, influenced my research design. As a former teacher and mentor myself, I was acutely conscious of the demands I might have to make on others if, in order to answer my research question, I were to collect qualitative data on OU PGCE English students and their school-based mentors. They both have pressing concerns of their own and little reason to cooperate (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). As a consequence, I aimed to investigate my research question by conducting a focused ethnography. This took the form of a case study, in order to identify the common and unique features of students learning to teach post-16. It is an appropriate methodology for my specific problem, because I was operating in a limited timescale and needed to systematically collect evidence as events and factors interacted (Bell, 1993).

This case study is intended to produce generalisations, but ones which may have an element of uncertainty built into them. Bassey (1995) recognises the difficulty of social research given the multiplicity of interacting variables operating in most situations, and that in practice “fuzzy generalisations” might be produced. I would argue that case study is strong on the subtle and complex realities of the social story, and can reveal the “embeddedness” of social truths. (Adelman et al, 1984). It can also provide an intelligible reality from which suggestions for intelligent interpretations of other similar cases can be made (Nisbet and Watt, 1984).

This holds true for mentoring, and for the problems student teachers face as they learn to teach post-16. Consequently, I designed a case study with the aim of illuminating the social processes related to the mentoring of PGCE English students on their post-16 teaching. Case study was chosen because of my desire to make sense of an under-researched area: how student teachers learn to teach post-16. The student and mentor data generated in this research may have a reasonable chance of general validity, particularly if a depth of understanding is

produced. As such, tentative formulations can be made that the same relationship may be found in other cases representing different post-16 mentoring contexts. Essentially, these are fuzzy predictions or “sound bites”. However, as it is uncertain whether they will apply in other cases, I have had to be cautious in my formulations. I can only claim what is likely to happen, on the basis of what Hammersley (2001) refers to as truisms extracted from experience, offering plausible reminders of what is already known.

The location of the case study in post-16 teaching is in a demonstrably contentious setting, in which the preservation of academic standards through A levels is in tension with an impetus to broaden provision for more pupils in a vocational direction, exemplified in recent years by GNVQ. This has culminated in Curriculum 2000, which has the stated aim of encouraging pupils to mix and match academic and vocational qualifications and increase the number of subjects taken in Year 12 to five. Unfortunately, the university sector in particular has given few signals to incentivise schools that this breadth will benefit their pupils. Consequently, the post-16 setting is one which will have to be constantly contextualised in this study.

When this issue is also related to an underplaying of post-16 training needs in the Standards for QTS, and an absence of scrutiny of how students learn to teach post-16 in the research literature, I would argue that case study could provide valuable new insights and be flexible enough to accommodate surprise discoveries, unanticipated effects and changes of direction, by taking an exploratory approach focussed on the process of research. The case study is intended to produce significant descriptive data which will be coded and categorised and from which theory will be generated. It will also offer the opportunity for the researcher’s role in meaning making to be interpreted.

In choosing a methodology which enabled me to open up and explore the unique features of particular cases of post-16 mentoring, I was intentionally working in the interpretive paradigm (Ernest, 1994). In order to make sense of, and illuminate student and mentors’ subjective understandings in a naturalistic

setting, I needed to gather data from multiple viewpoints on perspectives, experiences, attitudes and behaviours. The interdependent methods used to gather this data had to generate a sense of entering into the lived reality of the cases. They had to produce thick descriptions of accounts of human interrelationships, minimising bias. The unique features of the cases might then be illustrative of more general truths.

To this end, my aim was to gather sufficient data to generate substantive theory rather than seek to test formal theory (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The intention was theorising devoted to “micro” concerns (Hargreaves, 1985). In a sense, this case study emerged in the tradition of the transferability of the medical case study, in which research sought to illuminate a particular condition (post-16 teaching in schools) as an insight into practice in order to improve it by applicability beyond the immediate cases studied. Case study enabled me to develop multiple sources of evidence from an umbrella of activities with scope for data triangulation and methodological triangulation. This was a necessary aspect of the research design, because analysis of the complex and subtle perspectives of mentee and mentor needed to be rounded rather than segmented. This required detailed information from a small number of cases, gathered in a flexible manner to describe the complexities of these social actors in their particular contexts to provide typicality. This allowed amplification of voices not often heard, with an authenticity aimed at capturing their unique situation (Hammersley, 1999). It was thus a framework for integrating evidence from several sources.

For me, this meant the first priority was asking questions of student teachers about their expectations of, and experience of, post-16 teaching. This would be related to the mentoring they received. Secondly it also meant exploring with mentors their perceptions of post-16 teaching and what skills or input, student teachers might need. Thirdly, observation of mentor sessions would seek to clarify if appropriate training in relation to post-16 teaching were given. The case study was planned as deliberately cumulative research.

By concentrating on a relatively small number of illustrative student and mentor instances (Platt, 1988) I intended, and was able, to gain quite detailed information from each. I interviewed 22 students during the group, school-based and telerecorded interviewing. This included 2 follow ups, so information from 20 individual students was gained. I interviewed 5 mentors in 5 separate schools. This enabled me to include contextual information about school settings and professional ideologies which enabled some scope for holistic amplification of key features about the mentor/student teacher relationship in post-16 English teaching. My own researcher paradigm recognised the context specific nature, what Lave and Wenger (1991) call situated learning, of mentoring, and the uniqueness of the participants and the institution in which practice was being undertaken.

The rationale for my case study was developed as a series of linked stages, thus avoiding premature definitions (Ragin and Becker, 1992). These stages were carefully scheduled to coincide with periods of time when my participants (both students and mentors) were available for questioning and observation in the situated contexts that underpinned my case study design. I made decisions about where and when to conduct fieldwork, and the method of recording in order to accommodate students and mentors at periods in the academic year when issues related to the subject of the research were “live” and when participants were most likely to be able to concur with the researcher’s requests.

This was important, as I wanted student teachers to be alert to the issues of post-16 teaching as they became affected by them. Hence my research was carried out in the second half of the part-time PGCE, when students on school placement were spending the majority of their class contact solo teaching and when, for reasons of availability or in order to satisfy the Standards, post-16 was more likely to figure. Thus, the first (electronic) stage of my research took place in November and December 1999 when students were completing their third of four placements, the only one in a complementary school as opposed to their main partner placement. The second (group interview) stage took place in January and February 2000 at subject day schools prior to students embarking

on their final placements. The third stage, consisting of individual interviews during visits and telerecorded follow up interviews, took place in March, April and May 2000 when students were in, or had just completed, their final summative placement.

The window of opportunity for undertaking the fieldwork was also constrained by the fact that this cohort of English PGCE students proved to be the final one for the university (it is subsequently training PGCE students in secondary shortage subjects only). The knowledge that additional research opportunities would be limited after the final cohort went to the June 2000 award board added a tangible sense of urgency to the data gathering, and meant each stage was carefully planned, as far as is possible, to collect relevant data. The proposed timing and methodology was adhered to over the period in which the main fieldwork was undertaken. I was successful in my aim to retain sufficient flexibility in the research instruments to respond to changing contexts as necessary. This meant interview schedules were treated as frameworks in which key questions would be asked and key data sought over the course of an interview without slavish adherence to reading off set phrases. I was far more interested in ensuring my interviewees were relaxed enough to reflect and answer fully, and to this end empathy (by tone of voice, paralanguage and body language) was deliberately employed as appropriate.

Given the limited timescale available for the fieldwork, and my own role as a practitioner researching part-time, I planned for condensed fieldwork to collect evidence documenting the perspectives, attitudes and experiences of the two sets of participants. Temporality was thus constraining, but did provide a framework within which I had to work. The research design aimed to produce a set of anecdotes about two principal themes. Firstly, I was interested in student teachers learning to teach post-16. Secondly, I was interested in any mentoring they received. Five complementary methods of data collection were devised. The intention was to generate qualitative data capturing the naturalistic voice of student teachers and mentors telling the story of the post-16 mentoring process.

Stage 1 consisted of analysis of contributions to an e-conference on issues in post-16 English teaching, with data from this analysed to inform the selection of themes identified for an e-questionnaire.

Stage 2 consisted of semi structured group interviews, the schedules for which were informed by the electronic responses.

Stage 3 consisted of visits to interview mentors and students in schools, the schedules for which were informed by previous data. While in the schools I observed post-16 teaching and, where possible, the ensuing mentor session. I later conducted telerecorded interviews with students to confirm/ clarify previous findings.

Because of the need for rich data from multiple sources, the raw material collected for this study consisted of: 75 e-messages following various threads as prompted; 11 completed e-questionnaires; verbatim transcriptions of two 45 minute group interviews, five face-to-face student interviews, five face-to-face mentor interviews and five telerecorded student interviews (each lasting between 20 and 50 minutes); field notes from the two group interviews and ten face-to-face interviews; lesson observations from five post-16 lessons given by students during the school visits and observation notes of two mentor/student sessions.

The e-data and the transcriptions represented the participants' own frames of reference. The field notes and observations represented my perception of particular situations, usually including contextual information. Some of the transcriptions were done by me, but most were not. The latter were checked against the audio cassette recordings for accuracy, and occasionally amended in response to mis-hearings. I worked from three hard copies of each transcription.

The approach taken to the data analysis was in accordance with the principles of the qualitative case study in education (adapted from Macintyre, 2000) and using a framework drawn from grounded theory as summarised in Bartlett and

Payne (1997). Prior to starting the analysis, I had developed what Yin (1989) refers to as a set of theoretical propositions. These had been based on my professional knowledge in the field and adapted in light of my pilot study. They guided my data collection, and informed my analysis.

As the data began to be collected, two streams of analysis took place. One ran concurrently with the sequence of research methods employed from November 1999-May 2000. This consisted of a light touch, ongoing, iterative engagement with the emerging data, with the intention of informing and adjusting the research instruments in the light of tentative themes. The second was far more substantial, and was carried out research stage by research stage and then revisited when the fieldwork had been completed. As the data emerged, it supported my emerging conceptual framework (Nisbet and Watts, 1984).

First, the various data sources were coded on the basis of discrete ideas being conceptualised through meaningful chunks of text. Mostly, this consisted of participants' own words. This was done by labour intensive colour coding and highlighting on hard copy. Some categories emerged clearly from the interview questions as enhanced insights. These fairly open categories were reflected upon, labelled, numbered and then grouped together as related concepts. These were often triggered in a serendipitous way by new trains of thought as the data was sorted. Social chit chat was discarded. As points were clustered, I consciously had to refer back to the miscellaneous pile to reassign as appropriate. This enabled some ideas to be verified and others rejected. When repetition of data set in, with bulk being added but nothing supplementing the developing theory, I accepted saturation had taken place and stopped coding.

The task was then to reduce the data down, a process of focussing and condensing analogous to putting the data through a funnel. This enabled a manageable number of concrete examples to emerge inductively. Relationships and connections between these emerging themes were hypothesised, so that the most important and significant storylines came to the surface, in relation to their repeated presence as noted in the constant comparison. At this point the

researcher's field notes and observation notes were used to contextualise and deepen the analysis.

The themes were studied further to search for an argument, or more correctly a series of arguments, which were supported by the chain of evidence. The final conclusions which emerge are the theories produced which best fit the data.

The main problem with interpreting the data in the way I have is the potential skewing effect of imposing my own pattern on the data. Generally, I have represented the stories of my participants but I have attempted to avoid the distortion inherent in fitting in with pre-existing categories (Drever, 1995). By consciously putting my own prejudices to one side I have allowed the analysis to emerge from the data, not to be imposed upon it. I have taken an iterative approach to the analysis, mirroring the flexible, responsive technique I took to the data collection. I have attempted to compare and cross-check scrupulously across cases to triangulate the interpretation taken.

## **Pilot**

The pilot research undertaken in Stage 1 of the Ed.D was intended to establish what was feasible in two important aspects of the research. First, I was interested in the research process of managing both data collection and analysis on a piece of research conducted part-time. Second, I wanted to check the relevance of the topic by beginning to explore student teacher perspectives on the mentoring they experienced as they learned to teach post-16.

Nine dual purpose research/monitoring visits were planned to PGCE English students on their second school placements in November 1998 (see schedule in appendix). Due to a variety of circumstances related to student progress issues, seven semi-structured interviews with students or their mentors were eventually undertaken at the end of the professional focus of these visits. Questions were asked on student teacher expectations about the role of the mentor in relation to post-16 teaching. The visits were followed up with a questionnaire administered



to all nine PGCE English students attending a regional day school in February 1999. The series of prompts (see appendix 1) had been arrived at by analysis of my interview data.

One factor explored in the pilot was that I sought to minimise any effect of my own researcher presence and professional power relationship being coercive by emphasising anonymity of responses. Related to this, an important research skill learned was to take account of the impact of gender and ethical considerations on the data gathering and subsequent analysis.

In the pilot research in Stage 1 of the doctorate I am conscious that my professional role undermined my research role during aspects of the fieldwork. This was particularly true of interviews with individual mentors in schools, who tended to perceive me as visiting with my teacher educator hat on, rather than in a researcher role. This was my fault in attempting, due to inevitable time constraints, to combine my professional assessment tracking/monitoring visits with research visits. It also reflected a greater priority for mentors (particularly those on a distance learning PGCE) who were more anxious to discuss the progress of their student and administration of the course rather than my research into post-16 teaching.

The lesson drawn from this preliminary study was that for the required rich data to be generated, and to reduce the possibility of perceived role muddle in relation to my participants, research specific visits would need to be planned, and clearly signalled as such. The problem for me as a researcher was role tension related to the ethical issue of the researcher's power relationship to mentors and students.

The impact on my final methodology was to endeavour to avoid misrepresenting the purpose of my research, while simultaneously attempting to limit biased responses. The experience of role tension prompted a more explicit and transparent researcher stance in my main study. By signposting the ethical issue of the researcher's power relationship to mentors and students I at least

attempted to minimise the possibility of skewed responses. I also emphasised confidentiality of responses. The methodological lesson was learned through the research process. It confirmed that greater rigour, and greater flexibility in carrying out the research would be required, and that a much tighter interview strategy would need to be in place.

What data was gathered confirmed the broad focus of my question and the significance of the topic, and pointed to the value of exploring student teacher perceptions of post-16 teaching further as a relevant topic for doctoral research. It also revealed missing data, suggesting that the observation of mentoring in action should be explored.

### **Researching electronically**

In trying to understand the complex social context of student teachers and their mentors, I wanted to develop theoretical propositions to guide my data collection (Yin, 1989). In recording the perceptions and experiences of student teachers on a distance learning PGCE, all of whom were presented with a computer system loaded with First class conferencing software, it seemed appropriate to make use of the opportunity of computer mediated conferencing (CMC) for research purposes in order to generate those propositions, or what Boyle (1994, p.17) terms “pre-data”. It was intended that a broad range of students would voice their perspectives in order to inform the fieldwork in the next stage.

Bates (1995) describes the advantages of CMC for teaching and learning. If optional, over half a student cohort do regularly participate in national and regional conferencing. Topics can be split off by the moderator for further discussion or a focus of specific interest can be pursued and the use of sub-conferences distinguishes different topics of discussion. The text transcripts are archived for reflective interaction. The moderator can sequence instructions as appropriate and then scaffold, advise, encourage and feedback as well as communicating ethical issues clearly to all participants. Students engage

asynchronously, at their convenience, with no time or location pressures and in any sequence, therefore they can practice prior to responding.

All of these hold equally for a researcher moderating a conference, particularly if the ethical issues of power are underlined at the start. This point is important because there should be no suggestion that electronic research participants are coerced into contributing, or indeed constrained from contributing by the researcher's potential power status.

Other studies in the area of teaching through CMC have also made relevant points which can be adapted to a research possibility. Kyriakidou (1998) notes a key advantage of CMC in teaching and learning communities is the potential for perspectives from different schools across the country to be shared. This is relevant for two important reasons. First, students across a national provider like the OU can be accessed for research purposes, providing a genuine geographical spread of participants. Second, the differing contexts (LEA, school, department) in which students engage in learning to teach post-16 can broaden the study. She also notes the multiple roles participants adopt in electronic conferencing, suggesting the committed contributors are not the only students who engage. This is important for the data collection in my electronic research.

Tolley (2000) notes the creative possibilities of the moderator weaving of messages, and the positive value of participant empowerment. Computer conferencing has been recognised as allowing learner autonomy and enabling collaborative learning. (Berge and Collins, 1995, Noss and Pachler, 1999). It has also been reported as useful in the teaching of distance learning students (Field, 1997, McNerney, 1995). I consider this a valuable justification for using CMC for research possibilities with this group of remote distance learning students.

Effective ways of e-moderating to support teaching and learning have been explored in Paulsen (1995) and Salmon (2000). Models drawn from both,

especially the move from electronic co-operation to collaboration, were used in developing the e-research prompts. The work of Pearson and Selinger (1999) is also valuable. They suggest that CMC in ITT can help bridge the theory/practice divide by bringing school mentors, students and university lecturers together to provide discussion drawing on a variety of perspectives. While I was unable to include mentors in this way (they did not generally, at the time, have access to the same electronic resources) the student interactions drew on a number of perspectives from their own mentors.

Given the paucity of literature addressing the possibilities of using CMC for research purposes, I have adapted the ideas in the above to provide a framework for my own research thinking about subject/phase sub-conferences and e-questionnaires. To paraphrase Bates (1995): Researching through the computer is a new paradigm for student teachers at a distance.

A key methodological point was that my researcher stance was made transparent at the start to ensure participants in the conference and those responding to my questionnaire were taking part aware of my teacher/researcher role. In the conference my role was to prompt discussion and elicit responses. I am confident that, because I respected the privacy of individuals by protecting anonymity in this report, no harm has been caused to them and no exploitation is sought of their perceptions and descriptions of post-16 teaching.

My power relationship to the students could have presented ethical difficulties if I had only been researching (rather than teaching) them or if I was the tutor who assessed them directly, rather than a literally distant electronic voice. In emphasising my role as a neutral one which could feed into thinking about the new course currently being written, I was at pains to distance myself from being perceived as an assessor.

It was important for the appropriateness of using the conference as a research tool that I had, in the previous year, moderated a sub-conference in the 1998

OU PGCE English conference. This allowed me to pilot some effective (and abandon some ineffective) electronic teaching strategies. The main lesson to emerge was the necessity for a clearly structured, time specified programme that was explicitly signposted to students. The previous experience also alerted me to the value for all students (whether active participants or passive readers) of regular reviews/summaries of message threads.

When I was approached by the English coordinator to run a month long sub-conference as a guest speaker for the 1999 cohort, I was encouraged to embark on one on post-16 issues in English. There was thus a conflation of my teaching aims and my research needs, to explore the possibilities of using CMC to research the perspectives student teachers had of post-16 teaching. It was agreed with the English coordinator that I would be able to make use of the data generated in the conference for research purposes. Originally, I intended to simply record the unprompted submissions and responses to gather a flavour of the experiences students were having. On reflection, I opted to take account of my previous experience of moderating a conference and decided a more proactive, signposted and time-specified approach was needed.

I thus took the opportunity to incorporate a number of prompt questions relevant to my research question. The students were informed quite explicitly at the start of the conference of my twin role, and I was careful not to lead discussions once they had started. Instead, I attempted to steer a number of starting points for discussion in the direction of areas relevant to my research question. The broad areas of interest were agreed with the English coordinator prior to the conference commencing. They were:

Week 1: Teaching and learning literature in the post-16 classroom

Week 2: English Language teaching post-16

Week 3: Alternatives – Communication/Media Studies, Drama/Theatre Studies, GNVQs

See appendix 2 for examples of the methodology employed (my inputs) to prompt responses.

Across the month of the conference being live, 16 different students out of the potential cohort of 57 (30%) made 75 contributions. Contextually, the conference coincided with some students being on their third school placement, and thus preoccupied. Broader OU experience of electronic conferencing on the PGCE suggests not all students log on regularly, and not all have the confidence to participate actively. However, the issues emerging were relevant, and provided a valuable focussing down of the research question. It would be my contention that the data justified the relatively original use of such a research instrument.

The data drawn from the discussion threads in the conference fed into and informed the themes explored in the electronic questionnaire administered through the post-16 conference at its close. Six open questions were asked (see appendix 2 for schedule) to generate data on the following themes:

Models of post-16 teaching

Range of relevant experience

Mentor support for post-16 teaching

Mentor challenge for post-16 teaching

11 questionnaires were returned (20% of the cohort, but representing 70% of the students who had contributed to the conference). Some students subsequently reported the questionnaire coincided with highly pressured time on school placement, and others that they had been willing to respond in this way but had been unable due to technical difficulties. Despite this, a rich range of qualitative data was produced, and analysis of the findings provided valuable evidence for amplifying the type of post-16 teaching experience students had covered. It also confirmed the need for greater mentor involvement.

Although I grouped the two electronic data collection methods into one research stage, and certainly the focus of the e-questionnaire was arrived at iteratively from analysis of responses to the conference, the data collected in each is of a different provenance. Data gathered from the conference was submitted openly to all English students and the subject co-ordinator, and tended to be discursive responses to prompt questions, often following threads and pursuing issues raised by other students.

In contrast, the blank e-questionnaire was open to all, but responses were returned confidentially to my personal mailbox and thus were closed to others. It is possible that this impacted on the tone and content of the message, and that private thoughts or observations were shared. Interestingly, the similarity of the method lies in the asynchronous nature of both instruments, which allowed time for reflection appropriate to the individual.

### **Sampling and the group interviews**

In developing the fieldwork for the case study, I chose to sample a selection of PGCE English students from the potential cohort of 57 across England and Wales, and to sample a smaller selection of mentors supporting and training PGCE English students on their final school placement. This sampling developed from observer identified categories. For example, the twelve students who took part in the group interviews for stage 2 of the research were selected to provide: geographical breadth (Hampshire to County Durham); a range of ages (mid-twenties to late forties); ethnicity (predominantly white, minority Asian) and gender (predominantly female) distribution reflecting the cohort as a whole. A range of partner schools (comprehensive, grammar, secondary modern, independent, co-educational and single sex) were also represented in the sample. I was greatly aided in arranging this by access to a national electronic database.

My research engaged with a greater number of student than mentor voices because I wanted to establish a conceptualisation of what students wanted from

their mentors in relation to post-16 teaching as some shared consensus, before exploring, with visits to a selection of mentors, what they actually felt able to provide. Student perceptions of, and needs in relation to post-16 teaching had been established as a key theme in the electronic research. In order to open up what this meant for student teachers, semi-structured prompts relating to this theme were used in stage 2 of the research, the first part of the fieldwork, which consisted of group interviews with PGCE English students at regional day schools. My aim was to focus issues through asking pertinent questions, and to explore the debates they engaged in about post-16 teaching.

I had explored the potential of group interviewing with student teachers in my fieldwork for E835, and gained some insight into the advantages and pitfalls of such a method. However, this time I was researching students with whom I had some sort of a power relationship (Open University, 1998). The advantage of the relationship, albeit indirect, between researcher and researched, was what Goodson (1985) terms mutuality, for we already shared a potential interest in the topic. The disadvantage implicit in the power relationship required sensitivity in setting the interviews up, and in the conduct of them. In both instances I adopted a transparent approach to the ethical issues involved in researching students with whom I might be perceived as possessing a power relationship. To lessen the impact of my own role skewing the discussion, and any distorting effects that might occur, I conducted two separate group interviews, one in a region different to my own.

The interviews took place during lunch break in a busy day of PGCE related activities. The first was on 29 January 2000 in the north of England with eight English students from two adjacent OU regions (100% turn out). Five of the students present had contributed at least once to the e-conference and three had submitted e-questionnaire responses, so the group was a mix of those already fully engaged with the issues and others who had yet to indicate any engagement. The second took place in the south of England on 12 February 2000 with the four English students present (out of a potential seven). Only one



student present had contributed to the e-conference and had submitted an e-questionnaire response.

All students, the tutor conducting the day school and the organising Staff Tutor had been alerted beforehand, and students were given the option of not taking part. In the event, every student present (12 across the two interviews) agreed to take part. It is unclear if the provision of cakes was viewed as coercive.

The same agenda was followed on each occasion. Decisions about the structure of the research event had been informed by my experience of previous group interviewing on E835. Before starting I informed the students that I would ask a series of prompt questions and that the whole discussion would be audiotaped for future transcription. Students were assured any responses subsequently used would be referred to anonymously, and that my researcher role was separate to and distinct from my professional role as Staff Tutor. I also explained that if anyone felt peer pressure had prevented them from commenting on a specific issue, I would be happy to offer a follow up telephone conversation to allow thoughts to be clarified. I also ensured they would not be put off by the likelihood of my scribbling field notes as the discussions progressed. The interviews were audio-recorded and I took field notes to provide contextual information. The same prompts were asked in the same order and each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes.

The six prompts were piloted on a colleague for appropriateness and understandability. They are included in appendix 3 (see questions 2, 3 and 6). The advantage of my management role during the interviews was to be both reporter and facilitator, by ensuring all voices were heard equally. Immediately after both interviews I wrote notes about the conduct and organisation of the interviews in order to illuminate any issues or factors which might have impacted on the data gathered. This enriched and contextualised the evidence of students' perceptions about post-16 teaching and related mentoring. My fieldnotes for the first interview describe the context in which the group discussed my prompts:

*All 8 students are women, 7 white and 1 of Asian background. They range in age from early twenties through to mid-forties...all had evidently been working as a coherent group on shared activities all morning prior to my arrival. Some in the group had done straight swaps for Teaching in Another school placements and were aware of each other's shared contexts and concerns...Many had experienced only one opportunity to teach post-16 (on TIAS) because their LEAs operated 11-16 schools...by the end there was some evidence of shared consensus, and some significant differences...all felt at a remove from Year 13 teaching and the wider role of the sixth form tutor. (The order of the question prompts seemed to work, despite some overlap of responses).*

The second discussion developed differently, as is suggested in my fieldnotes:

*4 students, all white women, aged from mid-twenties to late forties. Group had been working similarly on shared group activities all morning, but one member was slightly dominant and there was not as developed a sense of group identity. 2 were partnered with independent schools, one of whom was training in-post. A third was partnered with a single sex selective grammar school, and the fourth had only experienced post-16 teaching on TIAS.*

I subsequently noted that both group interviews were good natured, consensual and participative. I am conscious that the consensus produced might still be a fiction (Wragg, 1984) but I am confident that the participants felt at ease in an atmosphere of rapport and thus a degree of truthfulness in contributions is more likely. I describe the administration and management of the interviews because I feel the wealth of relevant qualitative data they provided, particularly on the themes of preparedness to teach post-16, and actual experience of teaching

post-16, offers valuable insights which have both authenticity and validity. What emerged in the data was focussed on the contextualised learning of student teachers two thirds of the way through a part-time distance learning PGCE. The importance of such focussing is described in Kitzinger (1999) as the opportunity to concentrate on shared issues of concern. The student voice dominated, raising issues about subject specific needs and experiences. The most significant theme to emerge was the shared concern related to how student teachers gained the strategies to bridge the gap between pupils' experiences of English in Year 11 GCSE work and the demands of A level work in Year 12.

Group interviewing proved implementable and generated sufficient data. It was a methodology which required flexibility and a willingness to follow up seemingly idiosyncratic points. Individual statements could be challenged within the interview framework thus providing a form of self-correction. However, it necessitated the researcher being unavoidably implicated in creating meanings during the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1999). While recognising that orderly transcription does rework the meanings communicated by the interviewees, some of the findings corroborate other researcher forays into this area:

*It would be improper to suggest that every single student has a complete range of opportunities in that phase...we cannot provide because not enough schools offer every single student the chance to do really detailed A-level work.*

(Secondary B.Ed course leader, quoted in Furlong et al, 2000, p.113)

## Research visits to schools

The importance of the mentor role in learning to teach had been made often in the literature (recently in Timperley, 2001). The pilot study and Stage 1 electronic research confirmed that, without perhaps describing what it was that mentors did. Two of the question prompts for the group interviews were concerned with the quality of mentoring (see appendix).

However, the majority of the data on this theme was gained from the one-to-one school-based interviews with mentors and students. The interview schedule for these semi-structured, in-depth conversations was carefully developed out of the responses the student teachers had made in the group interviews. Different themes were pinpointed at different phases of the fieldwork, but these developed within a framework. They were carried out with in-built flexibility and adaptability to allow emerging themes suggested by my informants to be pursued and to allow answers to continually inform the evolving conversation.

The schedule, though carefully worded, was treated with latitude. I aimed to help participants structure their thoughts without leading them by probing rather than prompting, and I allowed the participants to ask me questions, thus establishing a climate for mutual disclosure (Holstein and Gubrium, 1999). However, I was conscious of the interviewer's advantage in being able to manage the research interview (Burgess, H, 1985). I began neutrally, but as the interview developed I made a more positive input to check viewpoints. In doing this, I intended to be non-directive and to minimise evaluative overtones in my input.

Following Stenhouse (1984) I tried to be polite, attentive, sensitive, thoughtful, considerate and rather respectful, but not familiar during each interview. This was a commonsense balance of friendliness and objectivity. My fieldnotes suggest, and my question to close the interview inviting an evaluation of the experience of being interviewed confirms, that generally I managed to achieve and sustain that level of conduct. Where appropriate, I also gave careful

attention to non-verbal cues and paralanguage. The transcripts reveal a research process closer to oral history, (Stenhouse, 1984) involving purposeful discussion of an educational problem of interest to experienced and novice teachers and a concern to illuminate people's perceptions of the research theme. I was able to use the interview to access past events (Scott, 1997). I did not pressure respondents to reveal anything about the issue discussed that they did not wish to, and made efforts to build a good relationship with them from the outset (Measor, 1985).

The research visits were each designed to a similar pattern, with fieldnotes to be taken of post-16 teaching observed, and audio taping of interviews with mentors and students and any discussions between the two. The sample was selected across a geographical, age and partner school spread to reflect the distribution across the cohort. I was interested to follow up some of the students who had taken part in the group interviews or who had been active in the e-conference and had agreed to a visit on the e-questionnaire. I also wanted to visit some I had never met or never had an electronic response from, to avoid the possible skewing effect of only researching what might be considered the "keen" students.

I intended to visit eight placements. The relatively small sample was influenced by the fact that all OU PGCE students were on their final placement at the same time, and it was impractical to visit a greater number at times when post-16 teaching was going on and mentors were available. I liaised with the English coordinator to confirm the broad direction of the research visits, and to rehearse the suitability of the potential sample group. Before contacting the mentors, I checked with OU regional Staff Tutors in the regions to which the students belonged, checking they were happy for me to visit, and requesting information about any student they would prefer I did not visit, for example failing students. This caused my sample to be modified and reduced slightly, though all were encouraging of the research.

I then wrote hard copy to each student on a short list c/o their school mentor at the start of their final school experience clarifying the nature of my request and included a pro-forma to return in a prepaid envelope. I offered a window of the final three weeks of the placement for my availability. Eventually I received four confirmations, brought up to five by a follow up email. Writing to mentors and students on university paper was an attempt to make something of my institutional background to open doors (Punch, 1998) and may have enhanced the academic status of the research request and increased the sample. However, it could equally have led to the request being lost in the myriad paperwork of PGCE partnership. On reflection, building in time for follow-up telephone calls may have increased the positive responses. Eventually I carried out five research visits in March-May 2000. My fieldnotes reveal the following contexts:

Research visit 1 took place on 20 March 2000. The partner school was a co-educational Roman Catholic 11-18 comprehensive in the south-east of England. The school had not had an OU PGCE student before. I observed the female student's post-16 lesson with the mentor, then I interviewed the mentor. She was a very experienced (over 25 years) Head of English who had mentored extensively, year on year, for the local university's PGCE internship scheme. Following this the student was interviewed.

Research visit 2 took place on 22 March 2000. The partner school was a co-educational 13-18 Roman Catholic comprehensive in the north of England. I interviewed the female student first, then observed a post-16 lesson with the female mentor (who had not mentored before), then observed the mentor debriefing session on that lesson. I finished by interviewing the mentor.

Research visit 3 took place on 30 March 2000. The partner school was a co-educational grant-maintained (Foundation) 11-18 comprehensive in East Anglia. They had not taken an OU PGCE student before. I observed the female student teach a post-16 lesson with the male mentor, then interviewed the

mentor (who had not mentored before). I then interviewed the student (who was a teaching assistant in a different school).

Research visit 4 took place on 10 May 2000. The partner school was an independent co-educational 11-18 in the midlands following the National Curriculum but specialising in pupils with dyslexia and other special needs. The school had previously worked with one OU PGCE student before (and subsequently employed her). I observed the female student teach a post-16 lesson, then interviewed her before interviewing the female mentor. The student had already been offered part-time employment at the school.

Research visit 5 took place on 20 May 2000. The partner school was an 11-18 co-educational comprehensive in Wales. I observed the female student teach a post-16 lesson, then observed the mentor debriefing on that lesson. I then interviewed the student before interviewing the female mentor. The school had worked with one OU PGCE student in a different department before. They regularly took students from a local university.

Each visit began with an observation by me, shared where possible with the mentor, of a student teaching a post-16 lesson. It was important to interview after observing, and not before, in order not to distort the teaching performance. I sat unobtrusively and took notes during this, very much in line with my customary ITT practice. I was careful to be explicit that the purpose of my observation was merely to provide a context and starting point for the issues that I would raise in my interviews. I tried to observe with the mentor in order that some comparison with the student's normal development could be made, to limit any effect of my presence. I did not want to be perceived by either party as possessing any sort of monitoring or assessment role. The data from the teaching observations tended to be used quite late in the process of analysis, to shed a deeper light on some of the issues raised. The observation data confirmed many of the themes that had surfaced in relation to student expectations and needs.

This post-16 teaching observation led, where appropriate, into me observing a mentor feedback/debriefing session on the post-16 lesson I had observed. This was audio-recorded and served the function of providing a shared context for what followed. I then interviewed student and mentor separately following the same semi-structured format, incorporating and exemplifying any appropriate topics with reference to the teaching I had observed. These were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed.

The observations of mentor sessions in which a debriefing took place on the post-16 lesson observed were fascinating, but because of particular staffing pressures in individual schools it was not possible to observe such exchanges on all my visits. What little data I did gain certainly emphasised the need for further research on what mentors actually do in their training role, although it is possible that such research would be more effective if kept separate from mentor/student interviews. There are undoubtedly ethical issues to take into account, both in terms of how the observations are conducted and the use to which they are put in subsequent analysis.

The semi-structured interview was an appropriate research instrument in the situated context in which I was researching for three reasons. First, it allowed me to access a rich vein of data from a number of participants, with confirmation of perceptions sought as we went along. Respondents were allowed to express at length, but the schedule prevented rambling (Wragg, 1984). Second, it was less structured and less hierarchical than survey and so allowed greater empathy and rapport to be used to generate trust and openness in the participants. Third, my professional standing ensured I was not merely tolerated as an inquisitor but responded to as an interested colleague (Finch, 1999). However, one disadvantage is the potential for researcher over-empathy, which could result in me putting words in my participants' mouths. I sought to avoid this by constant comparison with other sources.



## **Telerecorded interviews**

The subject specific aspect of my research was fully drawn out in the follow-up telerecorded student teacher interviews. The visits had raised a number of important issues in relation to the research generally and to the experience of post-16 English teaching in particular, providing a new, sharpened focus. As a result I sought to confirm the interpretation I was placing on the data thus far was appropriate. The prompt questions evolved out of the questions and responses from the school-based interviews, slanted to probe for greater detail in the emerging themes.

I chose to test the emerging ideas on a sample of five PGCE English students through telerecorded semi-structured interviews. The sample was selected to represent a geographical spread and to include students training while in-post, a distinctive feature of the OU PGCE (one as a school librarian, the other as an unqualified teacher in an independent school). This was done deliberately, in order to reflect more fully in the fieldwork the range of students attracted to a part-time distance learning PGCE. Such students had not been adequately represented in the group interviews. The unintentional gender bias of my previous sampling was balanced by one of the students being male. The fieldnotes taken after each interview reveal important contextual information to support and add to the data gathered.

Telerecorded interview 1 (2 May 2000) was undertaken with a female student from the north-east of England partnered with a 13-18 comprehensive. She had taken part in the first group interview and had signalled an interest in the issue. Telerecorded interview 2 (5 May 2000) was with a female student from East Anglia partnered with an 11-18 comprehensive. She was employed as a librarian in another school and had not communicated with me before. Telerecorded interview 3 (9 May 2000) was with a female student from the midlands partnered with an 11-18 comprehensive. She possessed a Linguistics degree and had responded to my electronic research. Telerecorded interview 4 (11 May 2000) was with a female student from London partnered with an

independent school with a small sixth form. She had responded to my electronic research. Telerecorded interview 5 (5 June 2000) was with a male student from the west of England partnered with a single sex 11-18 independent school. He was employed as an unqualified teacher. He had not communicated with me before.

Telerecording interviews proved a useful instrument to explore students' perceptions and experiences in relation to post-16 English teaching. Transcripts of the data suggest it proved a non-intrusive technology in terms of the openness of responses and the range of issues covered. The professional quality of the recordings also made transcription more reliable. The telerecorded semi-structured interview proved valuable in enabling a purposeful conversation with a series of key actors to take place, and to be safely recorded for subsequent analysis. Of course, it did not enable the non-verbal cues to be registered and responded to as in the face-to-face interviews, but I made great efforts to be as alert to communicative nuances as possible to gather appropriate data.

### **Methodological issues and problems**

The key ethical issue for me was whether the research process was influenced by gender power and political power relations which could influence the collection of data. Gender relations in the field have been significant. I am a male researcher, and the majority of participants in my study have been female. In quantity terms this ratio can be justified by a sampling technique which sought to replicate the 8:1 female/male ratio of English PGCE students across the cohort, and the proportion of female mentors in partner schools. I attempted to take account of these issues qualitatively by an ongoing awareness of the danger of gendered communication in the management of the interview as event (Brown and Darling, 1998). My perceived power status to student teachers and mentors had to be deliberately dampened in research situations. This was attempted by carefully planned and open questioning techniques, and by constantly checking my assumptions about the language in which statements

were couched. Ethics were intrinsic to my study (Punch, 1998) with potential problems highlighted to respondents and dealt with situationally and spontaneously if they arose.

My ethical stance as a fieldworker could also have been problematic. I have been acutely conscious of balancing sensitivity to the needs of participants (ensuring anonymity) with the social activity of collecting data. I aimed to afford privacy and dignity to all participants, and made a real effort to represent views accurately and in the spirit in which they were intended (Piantanida and Garman, 1999). As a consequence, decisions have been made which have affected the type of data collected and the interpretive procedures.

Researching an area of real professional interest to me could have run the risk of partisanship in the focus. I hope by being explicit about my researcher stance and openly acknowledging the gestation of the original interest, I will have mitigated that. It is through the deliberate choice of multiple methods of data collection, providing a chain of evidence to validate the truth of student and mentor perceptions that this case study attempts to satisfy the concern that interviews are socially constructed and in tension with researcher knowledge claims (Sikes, 2000).

The e-data and the interview data reveals how students and mentors perceive what happens in post-16 teaching, rather than what actually happens. To validate these perceptions, I have cross-checked across sources, comparing one informant's views to others, and across comparable situations in different schools and LEAs. I was also able to test perspectives against student and mentor documentation on the research visits, noting the minimal attention given to post-16 teaching.

I am aware that postmodernist approaches to writing up qualitative research, which question the notion of any fixed reality to triangulate, have moved away from the language of triangulation to an idea of crystallisation (Ely et al, 1997) reflecting partial multi-perspectives shaped by the researcher. I am not aiming

to claim any particular respectability for the validity of my research findings as a result of the comparison afforded by a variety of data collection methods, and am anxious to avoid what Coffey and Atkinson, (1996) refer to as vulgar triangulation. However, the differing voices and viewpoints have contributed to my explanation which may have wider resonance (Mason, 1996). What emerged from the data was a genuine issue, potentially applicable across secondary Initial Teacher Training in England and Wales:

*Things are so...in the particular case, so that they might be so in other cases. (Platt, 1988, pp 8-9)*

My professional role also gave me privileged access to data which resulted in me researching only those students who were passing the course. While this might skew responses, I have no doubt researching with vulnerable students close to failing would have been an unethical imposition and an additional pressure, as well as providing atypical data. I was of course careful to keep any such information to myself to protect the interests of individuals.

An additional problem to overcome was the institutional ethics of researching students and mentors who “belonged” to someone else, whether the English co-ordinator based centrally in the university or the regional academic responsible for ITT partnerships in the area I was visiting. In both instances I was careful to negotiate access ahead of time and with sensitivity.

I have given careful thought to the presentation of my interview data. I note that many case studies in education use pseudonyms to protect participant identity, while retaining a closeness to actuality. I rejected this for two reasons. First because the number of participants involved (over 20) would have rendered presentation of the analysis unwieldy, and second, because I did not follow the same participants through the three research stages. I was thus anxious to avoid a disorienting array of pseudonyms. Instead, I have chosen to anonymise. This protects the identities of participants, but allows contextual information to be integrated into the evidence.

I have also given careful thought to the presentation of my e-data, which has featured less often in education case studies. Rather than impose pseudonyms on a relatively large number of discrete data sources, I have anonymised numerically in order of data receipt. This protects identities, and for the e-conference, preserves a flavour of the message threads.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results of Data Analysis: Post-16 mentoring?**

The need for post-16 mentoring seems to have been overlooked. The literature on post-16 education virtually ignores the student teacher dimension in schools. Of the many researchers who have looked at effective mentoring, none has yet focussed on the particular training needs of the post-16 phase. There appears to be a significant gap, and an exciting opportunity for research which fills it.

In this section of results I will analyse the data gathered from each of the research stages to highlight the broad issues for student teacher and mentor in learning to teach post-16. The most significant finding, which extends what Bramald et al (1995) say about idealised preconceptions of teaching, is that the students in this study shared a preconception of post-16 teaching. They viewed it as an unproblematic setting in which highly motivated, culturally aware pupils discussed great literature. This means that their expectations of pupil capabilities are inflated and they possess a misconception of the teacher's role post-16. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering the lack of attention given to post-16 teaching in the literature

This analysis will amplify four of the problems raised, but insufficiently developed, in the literature. First, student under-preparedness to plan for differentiation in Year 12 teaching, reflecting to some extent the literature on over-specialised A levels (Lawton, 1992, Richardson, 1993, Macfarlane, 1993). The literature suggests A levels are overloaded with content and assessment producing, as a consequence, a stultifying pedagogy. My data picks up this issue, but takes it in a different direction, that of the impact on student teachers.

Second is the relative invisibility of mentoring geared specifically to the post-16 phase. This modifies what Reid and Jones (1997) claim about arbitrary mentoring. What emerges is a real issue in consistency of training opportunities for student teachers. Third, I will use the data to illuminate the significance for student teachers and their mentors of the gender imbalance in post-16 classes, alluded to in the literature (Watson, et al, 1994) but with little attention given to the effect on pedagogy.

Fourth, the data is used to explore the value of students gaining experience in the vocational alternatives to A level post-16, noted in Sharp (1997) and Butcher (1998) and to which the Standards allude but fail to suggest how this should be managed. The section ends with a clarification of the positive experience for some students that post-16 teaching provides, in recognising, celebrating and drawing on a student's subject knowledge.

### **A truism uncovered: student over-expectation of Year 12 learners**

The electronic conference enabled a number of students to share their perceptions and expectations about post-16 teaching in a non-threatening way. The data emerging provided a developing context for my research, raising a number of issues. Key amongst these was the discomfort some student teachers described in their early experiences of post-16 teaching. This affected two groups of students, those in awe of the mystique of A level and those who struggled to build bridges for their pupils between GCSE study in Year 11 and A level study in Year 12. Both represent a shattering of illusions about post-16 teaching. The over-expectation is best represented by the following contribution, one of many on the topic:

*With the smaller groups of pupils who have chosen to stay on after GCSEs, one assumes a desire to learn and a certain motivation. The rudiments of both appear to be there, but the lack of maturity in a 16 year old means we can often treat them as we would an undergraduate and give them too much to work with, both in terms of ideas and quantity of work. (e-conference msg 10)*

The role of the mentor in preparing students for the likelihood of passive and unsophisticated post-16 learners would appear to be an important task for pre-placement discussion:



*I did find it difficult to motivate most of the pupils. It took a few lessons for them to start thinking for themselves - many of them seemed to want everything spelt out for them... My Year 12s are as interactive as blocks of wood (e-conference msg 12)*

More valuable is the perception generated by the following student, but arrived at without significant mentor input:

*Having done three sessions with these Year 12 pupils, I feel I am getting to know them a little. It's amazing how easily scared they are.... they are frightened of making fools of themselves.... when I was doing my OU degree adults in tutorials felt pretty much the same. (e-conference msg 2)*

The gap between expectation and actuality seems, for these students, to be a profound one. Year 12 pupils are reported as still being, to some extent, in GCSE mode, while students have planned for teaching them as if they were about to teach a class of undergraduates. The challenge for mentors is to support and challenge their students in order to close that gap.

A number of these post-16 issues re-emerge in the responses to the e-questionnaire. Key amongst them were the expectations student teachers described of teaching more confident pupils and their surprise at the lack of confidence they observed. On a related point, they were generally surprised at the level of explicit teacher guidance to pupils in the post-16 lessons they had observed, and the tendency for A level lessons to be teacher led. This seems to confirm what Macfarlane (1993) argues about the comfort zone of didactic teaching post-16. The expectations are explained thus:

*My expectations of pupils' progression post-16 was much too high ... I drew on my fairly recent undergraduate experience for this. (e-questionnaire 10)*

It seems that neither the course materials, nor the school-based training had touched sufficiently upon appropriate and effective models of post-16 teaching and learning. However, it was important for the validity of the research process that such individual views and perceptions were tested out with groups of student teachers for confirmation, to avoid over-reliance on idiosyncratic or atypical responses. Certainly, the issue of over-high expectations resonated with many participants in the group interviews:

*I expected perhaps a different relationship with the pupils given that they had actually chosen to stay on. I thought I would have an easier time.*

*I expected smaller groups, few discipline problems and more motivated pupils.*

*I thought teaching methods might be a lot more like an undergraduate seminar, sitting around having a lot more discussion.*

*I was expecting the post-16 pupils to be quite high academic ability ... that was not the case ... we actually had some lowish ability pupils and I was quite taken aback. (four participants from group interview 1)*

The reality described, of a wide ability range amongst post-16 pupils with many struggling with the demands of A level, is an important corrective to the false expectations freely shared in the groups. It would seem that discussions with mentors had not prepared students for what seems to be the reality of sixth form teaching. The literature is thin on analysis of the wide ability range of pupils studying post-16, particularly in A level classes. Daw (1996) mentions in his study of successful A level departments that the less gifted pupils suffer if teachers do not differentiate sufficiently, and Stanton and Richardson (1997) acknowledge the diverse needs of post-16 pupils. However, the evidence from

this data is that students began post-16 teaching in relative ignorance of the breadth of capabilities they might encounter.

What was emerging from the data was a shared perception amongst students of a gap for their post-16 pupils between success in Year 11 learning and what Year 12 pupils were being asked to do. Of the Year 11/Year 12 divide mentors commented:

*The GCSE pupils are spoon-fed, it is not a preparation for A level. (Mentor, school visit 2)*

*Year 12 pupils so lack in confidence, in speaking, voicing their own views, very often trainee teachers tend to put them on the spot too much and they are too lacking in confidence to cope with that... without a little group work before they are put on the spot they get frozen with fear and they won't speak... A lot of new teachers to A level just concentrate on going through a text ..... trainees can't see the wood for the trees ..... it's very difficult to teach pupils to analyse ... very bright pupils have those skills automatically, but the weaker ones don't acquire them without having been taught.*

*(Mentor, school visit 1)*

This would appear to suggest fertile ground for some challenging mentor interventions in getting students to reflect on the teaching strategies that might work more effectively than the undergraduate model they have drawn upon. Some mentors were able to articulate the problem areas, but most students did not report this level of mentor engagement post-16.

Students on the school research visits were also able to confirm the difficulties presented by the realities of teaching Year 12 pupils:

*I approached year 12 texts thinking I was going to share ideas rather than teach. I thought we would be at the same level...but it's almost continuing with GCSE...as a student teacher I thought that my role was not to be a facilitator but to be a learner with them...I thought having chosen to stay on, they wouldn't be able to stop themselves. (Student, school visit 1)*

My observation of this student's post-16 lesson during my research visit proved instructive in framing and contextualising the questions in my subsequent interviews. I noted that, fresh from her degree, the student assumed the pupils were more committed than they actually were. Her reliance on open questioning and relatively unclear tasks with no notion of time allowance communicated, resulted in a lesson on a satiric text by Swift leaving the majority of the class unenthused. She was more effective in circulating quietly amongst small groups and reading the text out to the whole class, but her planning had not recognised the needs of these learners. Her mentor offered a similar critique.

Similarly, on my second research visit, I observed with the mentor a Year 12 lesson on practical criticism using poems by Blake and Shelley. I noted the student made no reference to poetic form, made no use of the board and failed to manage the discussion feedback resulting in disjointed responses. Although she had used innovatively a sung version of the Blake poem on audiocassette, and she had persisted in her endeavour to reorganise groups so that the boys (the minority) were not all clustered in one group, I concluded her teacherly presence in the class had been tentative.

In this instance, observation of the mentor feedback session proved fascinating. The mentor did much as the literature would recommend. She employed a warm tone, with plenty of positive eye contact and asked lots of prompt questions following up her fulsome observation sheet. Unfortunately, because of a possible combination of being new to mentoring and being nervous in my presence, she proceeded to completely dominate the "discussion". This resulted

in the kind of supremacy ceded by students to their mentors reported in Haggarty (1995a) and to the description of the “imperial mentor” in McNally and Martin (1998). The student’s stilted acknowledgements of shortcomings were drowned in a sea of suggestions which eventually obfuscated any clear targets. As the student did not make notes, I consider it doubtful how much of the mentor’s support and challenge made an impact.

The danger is that students experiencing difficulties in differentiating post-16 could struggle if mentor involvement is absent, imprecise or oppressive, be put off, and resort to the kind of didactic model described in the literature (Hardman and Williamson, 1998).

The telerecorded interviews offered a final opportunity to shape my emerging findings. The key issue again appeared to be student teachers’ unrealistic expectation of an undergraduate seminar style small group discussion, in which pupils exercised independent thinking:

*At post-16 pupils had chosen to be there and I supposed something approaching undergraduate study...however their behaviour was surprising, with tussles over who sat in which chair...and staring out me as the teacher...my guard was down re these discipline offences...and in the end I had to stress their behaviour was unacceptable...key question for me: what is my relationship with the sixth form? How far is it different from lower down the school? (Telerecorded interview 5)*

Clearly, students can be thrown if their expectations are dashed. This far broader range of abilities represented in the post-16 classroom is recognised in some of the literature, (e.g Stanton and Richardson, 1997). It needs to be a topic of mentor/student discourse if more varied post-16 pedagogies are to be encouraged and that planning is pitched at an appropriately differentiated level:

*I went in thinking I'd be able to use a lot of the smaller group techniques and I found that I didn't...I really had to go back and sort out what they had done at GCSE. (Telerecorded interview 2)*

*It's difficult to get Year 12 pupils to talk. (Telerecorded interview 3)*

*I anticipated A level teaching would be much more of a seminar, especially with fewer pupils in the class...I suppose it was quite naïve to expect that they'd be different from working with Year 11...student teachers come part way through a term and do not know what preparation has been done. (Telerecorded interview 1)*

This litany of essentially similar comments is somewhat alarming given that neither the Standards nor the literature pay sufficient attention to ensuring students are aware of the pitfalls of post-16 teaching. It is left to mentors to work with their students in order to suggest suitable strategies through training.

*Post-16 pupils think they have done it all because they have done one set of major exams, they seem to think that they are experts in all the fields...our job is to bridge that...You are trying to develop an individual to be responsible for themselves...many times we get post-16 pupils who have not actually achieved independent working...we now have pupils trying to do A levels or other post-16 courses that 20 years ago they wouldn't have been considered for. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

This valuable insight was shared with me as a researcher, prompted by semi-structured questioning. It is exactly the sort of input that students need, but up to the time of my visit this had not been shared with the student. Other mentor

insights, similarly prompted, are equally relevant examples of the kind of “practical knowledge” (Zanting, 2001) which students would have benefitted from receiving.

*It is absolutely true that most students come in expecting to teach maybe at undergraduate level or a little below, and have to reassess the situation...it seems an assumption that post-16 pupils have chosen to stay on at school so therefore they are going to be motivated...there is a big difference between a pupil new to post-16 and somebody who has been doing it for a year. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

Realising how long it takes many post-16 pupils to find the right ‘level’ could be of potential benefit to student teachers in enhancing Year 12 responsiveness, with the explicit aim of making pupils feel included rather than excluded. If, through the training dialogue, mentors could empower student teachers to give real attention to the specific learning needs in Year 12, comments such as the following might be less common:

*I have not done enough differentiation in sixth form... thinking they all have to do the same exam, therefore they should all do the same homework. (Student, school visit 1)*

Mentors, on this evidence, need to challenge their student’s preconceptions of post-16 teaching early on in order to prevent the unsatisfying and ineffective teaching experiences described, from which little positive was learned. This confirms the fears expressed by OfSTED (1998a) and reiterates the absence of challenge reported in Furlong and Maynard (1995) and Martin (1996). If challenge was offered in relation to Year 12 teaching, but supported through genuine experience of Year 13 teaching, a clearer, more informed picture of post-16 teaching would develop for students. The benefits envisaged by Daloz (1986) and described in Hollingsworth, (1989) might then be realised. Unfortunately, few participants in this study managed the challenge.

## **Hands-off mentoring: training in differentiation?**

As with any aspect of a teaching practice, these student teachers experienced problems with rapport as post-16 pupils adjusted to the change of teacher. The unexpected experiences described in the data cannot be explained that simply though. There is a dilemma. On one hand, students assumed post-16 pupil capability to be high and academically motivated, and appropriate pedagogy is therefore planned to be interactive and discussion based. On the other hand, the reality is experienced very differently, with post-16 pupils revealed as possessing a wide range of abilities and motivations, and being insecure in their responses. The work of Higham (1996) and Watts and Young (1997) highlights the connection between the narrow curriculum post-16 and the teaching approaches adopted, leading to pupil opportunities in post-16 education being severely limited except for the upper ability range. The dilemma is revealed as an important topic for mentors to confront and support in their training role.

The need for differentiation, as emerging in this data, clearly does not stop at 16. Discussions about differentiation post-16, part of an active role for mentor intervention, is particularly pertinent when student teachers are given (understandably in some contexts) a relatively limited access through which to experience post-16 teaching. For example:

*I can foresee difficulties getting a lot of post-16 experience  
.... a teacher I am meant to be working with in year 12 seems  
reluctant to have a student in ..... I was hoping to be  
consolidating, not broaching new territory. (e-conference  
msg 6)*

This emphasises the importance of the mentor management role in the partner school, so that any partnership includes sufficient training in post-16 teaching. Where students had been able to work with a broader range of post-16 classes, the perceptions altered significantly:



*From observations at my partner schools all the pupils were reluctant to contribute anything to discussions, even when the teacher asked particular pupils to contribute. Pupils were far more confident at Year 13. Perhaps it is a lot to do with A level being such a huge jump from GCSE and pupils are in just such awe over it. (e-conference msg 11)*

This student teacher, distinctly in the minority in terms of breadth of post-16 experience, had an insight into what happens to pupils over a two year A level course: they develop in confidence and learn vital independent study skills. This is an important factor if student teachers are denied access to a full range of post-16 teaching. How will they know what their Year 12 pupils are working towards? A partial picture does not aid their ability to plan appropriately differentiated classes. The result could be an overvaluing of the pedagogic approaches they adopt in the post-16 classroom (Hardman and Williamson, 1998, Hardman and Leat, 1998).

Despite a prevalence of what might be called “hands-off” mentoring, a range of strategies were reported on, which had worked in the various post-16 contexts in which student teachers found themselves. For some students, recourse to lower school approaches based on observation was the answer:

*Some pupils find the gap between GCSE and A level daunting ... in the first months of Year 12 my schools focuses on pupil enjoyment and confidence with a carry-over of lower school activities. (e-conference msg 7)*

This approach seems appropriate, but its generalisability presupposes similarly informing mentor/student conversations prior to post-16 teaching commencing. For other students, a more interventionist approach was adopted:

*I treated the A level set I had as an OU group. I have only just finished an OU degree and I loved the led discussion style of teaching. However, it took a while for the group to feel comfortable enough to relax with me. I became an agent provocateur and the day one girl disagreed with me I counted as a breakthrough. The group needed quite a lot of guidance.*  
(e-conference msg 9)

This seems tough on the student, and tough on the pupils, One wonders about the learning and confidence of the remaining pupils who did not elect to disagree. The result could be post-16 pupils, who crave empathy and warmth (Harkin, 1998, 1999), remaining unconfident and uninvolved. However, such intensive and active attempts at motivation are exhausting for a student teacher:

*I have found a good approach is to be fluid and use brainstorming a lot to develop ideas, keeping pushing them ..... I do find my approach very rewarding, but totally knacker as it requires complete "on the ballness" and flexibility from the teacher.* (e-conference msg 10)

The impression given is of some student teachers finding their own strategies without mentor involvement. This is a risk in an intensive course of initial teacher training, in which a sink or swim approach would not be acceptable pre-16, and where unaligned approaches to post-16 teaching could have a very negative effect on pupil learning.

*I used pretty much the same sixth form teaching strategy as was used on me: Teacher-led whole class discussion.* (e-questionnaire msg 3)

This goes some way to confirm the argument used by Elliott and Calderhead (1995) that students draw on their own experience as pupils, in this case sixth

formers. However, it is the description of the differences from undergraduate teaching that is instructive and helpful:

*On observations of A level classes I found them fairly similar to my OU tutorials ... this encompassed room lay-out, informality and guided debate. The differences were in the amount of guidance provided by the teacher, the reluctance or lack of confidence of some pupils to joint debates, the very specifically guided research, and the structured lessons plans followed by the teachers. (e-questionnaire 1)*

A number of student teachers noted this physical transition of the post-16 classroom, which they perceived represents a break from Year 11. In fact, on my second research visit, the Year 12 lesson I observed began with the student and mentor moving the desks from their previous lecture style arrangement. The student confided that she had taken A levels at Sixth form college, and expected more of a seminar style. This illustrates the conundrum for student teachers confronted with the post-16 classroom. It tends to possess an air of undergraduate informality, as symbolised by a more open room layout. But it would seem the Year 12 pupils present are struggling to handle the transition from Key Stage 4 and lack undergraduate level skills of independent learning.

Student teachers need to learn early in their practice from their mentor that structured guidance, coming from carefully differentiated planning, is more likely to lead to effective post-16 teaching. As the literature attests (MacFarlane, 1993, Richardson, 1993, Bramald et al, 1995), confronted with the problem of assessment and the pressing need to get through the syllabus, many teachers the students had observed seemed forced into a more teacher-directed pedagogy. This may be a painful lesson for student teachers to learn without mediation by their mentor. It would also seem to discourage students from innovatory teaching strategies with their post-16 pupils.

The visits to schools to interview mentors and students provided an opportunity for more detailed investigations of these issues and exploration of how they really impacted on the experience of student teachers. Mentors certainly recognised the concerns reported and offered the following explanations. Of the lack of attention mentors give to post-16 teaching:

*Often in schools perhaps we take our sixth form teaching too much for granted because pupils doing A level want to be there, and there are so many initiatives lower down the school that have to be seen to .... I think the focus will change again because with the modular A levels starting there will be a huge focus on structuring sixth form courses and looking at subject matter and methods of delivery .... but it may become more difficult for student teachers to access sixth form teaching because schools will be very anxious ..... it is difficult to give trainees public examination classes. (Mentor, school visit 1)*

There are three important points raised here. First, if schools do take their post-16 teaching for granted, it places an even greater onus on the mentor to draw out relevant issues for the student, rather than leave them to their own devices. Second, the changes introduced in Curriculum 2000 will need time to settle, yet current students in training will need to reflect even more carefully on post-16 teaching if the pressure of assessment at the end of Year 12 is not to have a deleterious effect on pedagogy. Third, if one effect of the changes is to make it less easy for students to experience post-16 teaching during their training, the dangers of a vicious cycle of cursory attention to the needs of post-16 learners could become embedded in ITT.

The literature suggests A levels (Pound, 1998) and, in a different way GNVQ (Butcher, 1998), offer new ways of learning for post-16 pupils, yet on the evidence of this data student teachers struggle to find their own way of dealing with this. This can have a significant impact, when for many the majority of

their time in school is spent working in Key Stages 3 and 4. There are two issues for mentors. The first is how to train students to differentiate at Year 12 in order to facilitate progression from Year 11. The second is how to offer any clarity about the differentiation from Year 12 to Year 13 which seems generally absent but which would enable students to see a fuller picture of where they were going with Year 12s.

Mentors also need to be pro-active in engaging with, and if necessary challenging models of post-16 teaching drawn from a student's own experience of being in sixth forms themselves, or models developed from emulating the behaviour of observed teachers.

*I observed popular post-16 teachers teaching, as they blended thinking aloud with a judicious blend of writing down and direct questioning and sounding authoritative...it was at a lower level than I expected, and it needed structuring...there was a need to scaffold even more to accommodate the range of abilities English attracts.*

(Telerecorded interview 5)

Learning to teach is challenging enough for students without additional struggles and stresses from their post-16 teaching. Some mentors do manage to be highly supportive despite other professional demands on their time. Regrettably, the experience many students in this research had of "hands-off" mentoring does those students no favours as they are left to learn to teach post-16 unaided. A more consistent and engaged model of mentoring needs to develop to ensure equity of experience for students across all settings incorporating their post-16 teaching.

## **The effects of gender imbalance on post-16 classes**

Girls outnumber boys in post-16 English classes. Watson et al (1994) established that girls think English is less difficult and more interesting than (at the other end of their continuum) Science subjects. Girls apparently enjoy the idea of freedom in English, of being able to express themselves using their perceived flair for writing. This interest in their own writing, rather than discussions, is interesting. For some student teachers, surprise at the passivity of year 12 groups could be explained in terms of gender issues:

*The liveliest pupils were the boys .... including discussion on the issue of feminism. Girls liked taking notes and did so even when they were told to just listen and contribute orally* (e-conference msg 3)

*There is a gender breakdown. The boys contribute orally whereas the girls are more reluctant, they are hesitant about contributing.* (Student, school visit 2)

*I feel guilty forcing girls to talk...they would have been quite happy to watch and take notes.* (Student, school visit 1)

Of this gender divide affecting post-16 pupil passivity, comments from mentors included:

*We do have a lot of strong boys and they are more vocal than the girls .... perhaps the boys are initially more forthcoming so you have to be more aware of that and make sure you have opportunities of drawing everybody in.* (Mentor, school visit 1)

This particular aspect of learning in post-16 classrooms is overlooked in the literature on post-16 teaching and it certainly raises issues if students persist in

planning for undergraduate style discussion. Interestingly, a number of the student interviewees, who were all female, expressed particular disappointment at the gender issue of girls sitting passively and taking notes in contrast to some of the male pupils who were over vocal. Strategies for dealing with this are absent from the course, a major omission and one which mentors have been unable to fill.

All five of the lessons I observed on my research visits contained significantly more girls than boys. No evidence was offered of mentors suggesting planning strategies to circumvent the gender stereotypical behaviour. On this point the case study findings are perhaps establishing an agenda item for inclusion in courses of ITT or during the induction year. The pedagogy of gender imbalanced post-16 classes is an aspect of the hidden post-16 curriculum which students would have appreciated more input on. If the course materials do not provide it, the mentor will need to.

*There were many more girls...it was a big surprise for me...they hang on your every word and write everything down. (Telerecorded interview 1)*

*There was a gender divide with many boys adopting a bull in a china shop approach to oral contribution. The able pupils, boys and girls, tended to be very quiet and it certainly needed careful planning to bring out their thoughts. (telerecorded interview 5)*

Again, the effective solution seems to have been developed by some students of their own accord as they went along: careful planning of group work and discussion to draw out responses from both boys and girls with appropriate sensitivity. Unfortunately the mentors seem not to have picked this up as a training issue requiring challenge. Given what the literature says about the longevity of the gender divide in post-16 English classes (Brown, 2001), there seems to be a significant gap in advice and guidance given to ITT students.

## **Partial training: what of GNVQ? What of Year 13?**

One marginal factor of interest which did emerge was reported by the minority of students who had experienced the teaching of vocational alternatives post-16.

*On placement, I asked the Business Studies department if I could observe some of the GNVQ lessons. They were very obliging and encouraged to support them, especially with IT. I delivered one of the GNVQ Advanced lessons to Year 12. It was very interesting ... it did use English and it was very enjoyable. (e-conference msg 22)*

This seems significant for Open University PGCE students who tend to be mature and tend to be entering teaching as a career change with other professional skills behind them. If mentors are able to manage training in post-16 teaching to include GNVQ as appropriate, it could enhance students' curriculum vitae for job applications. It could also add value to the partner school in those areas of the post-16 curriculum not always enjoying equal status to A levels (Canning, 1999, Eggleston, 2000).

However, the majority of students had not had the opportunity to investigate or experience alternatives to A level post-16. At a time when more and more schools are broadening their post-16 provision to retain pupil numbers (Sharp, 1997) this must be considered a missed opportunity to enhance student teachers' employment prospects. It again suggests an outdated perception of specialist, single subject A level provision. Mentors might need to address this if the course materials do not.

Two specific fears were expressed during the group interviews which could impact on broader concerns about learning to teach post-16 in a course of ITT. The first relates to limited experience in Year 13. As one student put it:



*I think that because you are only there for such a short time ... you don't see how A level courses go from the beginning and how they finish at the end, you only see snippets of them. The thing I am going to be frightened of is how it all pulls together.* (Participant in group interview 1)

While there is obviously insufficient time in a PGCE course, whether full or part-time, to experience the complete working through of an A level course, nonetheless this does seem a valuable topic for mentor explanation. A key mentor task post-16 might be to offer a holistic overview into what an A level course means for both teacher and pupil. This would go some way to mitigating the partial and disaggregated understanding students such as these have described. It also points to the possibility of a very focussed target for the NQT's induction year. This latter aspect is beginning to be raised in the literature (Fletcher, 2000) as the recently introduced Career Entry Profile, (DfEE, 1999) becomes embedded in mentor and student thinking.

The second fear returns to those alternatives to A level which were reported by students as being inadequately covered both by the course and their mentors. One student claimed:

*I would not feel too bad about being prepared for A level teaching, but GNVQ I feel little experience of and it's obviously a growth area in some schools.* (Participant in group interview 1)

In the other group interview, a student asserted:

*With no experience or understanding of the vocational curriculum, I expect not to apply for jobs if GNVQ is mentioned.* (Participant in group interview 2)

My field notes record the rest of the group agreed. This then seems further evidence of a serious omission in secondary initial teacher training if students are inadequately prepared for all the teaching possibilities on offer. It also means mentors are perhaps missing a training opportunity with their student teachers, which might only mean managing their student's visit to another department or even another institution for observation of GNVQ in action.

*I feel prepared to teach post-16 as a newly qualified teacher, but not as well as I might due to teachers' reluctance to release classes for post-16 practice...at post-16 they are loath to let go. (Telerecorded interview 5)*

*Neither of my placements looked at vocational alternatives, which would have been useful as I don't know much about the content of those courses. (Telerecorded interview 4)*

Unless the importance of students gaining an understanding of Year 13 teaching can be addressed, and unless the differing pedagogies on GNVQ alternatives to A levels can be included in a meaningful way, the perceptions of these students will continue to be all too representative. The former could be improved by mentors using collaborative strategies more explicitly with their Year 13 groups. The latter could be satisfied by more "hands-on" mentor management of liaison with other departments or other institutions, as necessary. These reflect the kind of recommendations arising out of previous studies (McNally and Martin, 1998, Stanulis and Russell, 2000) which encourage a broader notion of mentoring, with less of a burden falling on individuals.

## **The positive impact of training to teach post-16**

In spite all the problems reported in learning to teach post-16, the data does present positive evidence about the benefits to student teachers of post-16 teaching too rarely heard by policy makers. One contextualising factor to emerge from analysis of contributions to the e-conference was the evident enjoyment many students had experienced in teaching this post-16 phase:

*I really enjoyed this end of the age range because my degree is quite recent and so I feel confident with the material and teaching level. (e-conference msg 1)*

*I have really enjoyed the sixth form teaching that I have done, and have found that there is a satisfaction in terms of subject knowledge that is less evident when teaching younger pupils. (e-conference msg 7)*

Students appreciated teaching at this level because it got them thinking about their subject. This underlines the possibility of policy makers presenting post-16 teaching in a way which enhances retention amongst newly trained teachers. There is little doubt that for most students post-16 teaching is viewed as a plus point in considering secondary teaching as a career. If mentors were able to give greater attention to this phase, especially if supported by more explicit reference to post-16 teaching in the Standards, students might perceive secondary teaching as drawing more fully on their subject knowledge, so that relevant training can focus on differentiating that subject knowledge.

Conversely, there is evidence of the reality being far less daunting than some student teachers' fears:

*I was really worried about teaching post-16, the subject content more than anything, but it wasn't half as bad as I thought it would be.*

*I felt quite intimidated before I actually got to work with my post-16 group ... but I found teaching the A level group very rewarding and stimulating.* (Both participants in group interview 1)

For these students, rapport with their teaching groups overcame any previous fears of post-16 teaching they had. The problem for mentors is how to model such rapport in a way which counters the ill-thought through preconception and over-expectations the majority of the students seem to experience.

## **Conclusion**

Students describe preparation for post-16 teaching as being heavy (heavier than pre-16) and they recognise the pressure of being the academic expert in the classroom, which is not present in 11-16 teaching. Neither issue is sufficiently addressed in an already packed ITT course. The imbalance in training is striking. This suggests the possibility of genuine assessment of competence in post-16 teaching being postponed until the induction year, simply due to the impossibility and undesirability of forcing a quart (all the Standards) into a pint pot (up to 24 weeks of school experience). For example, a particular issue which would seem important as an induction target would be:

*I want more experience of post-16 assessment...there is a big jump between Year 12 and Year 13.* (Telerecorded interview 2)

However, the perception of existing teachers who do not teach post-16 is reported in an interesting way by one ITT mentor, and illustrates the scale of the problem associated with attempts to improve standards in post-16 teaching:

*They (other teachers) see it as a complete doss...as a small group of pupils where there are no discipline problems and they are all eager to learn...I think the problem is that a lot of*

*people teaching post-16 think I have done this for years...  
and in fact it needs just as much flexibility as when you were  
say suddenly thrown in at the deep end teaching reception  
class...post-16 is the one time a school teacher hasn't got the  
clout of saying if you don't do this, x, y or z will follow...you  
are in a non-compulsory situation. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

Perhaps the issues raised by the data in this research have an impact beyond the confines of ITT and into the domain of continuing professional development for teachers. It is apparent that, within the bounds of this case study, mentors are the solution. They often possess the effective teaching strategies to motivate passive post-16 pupils, and yet students in this study have too often described their own erroneous assumptions of pupil motivation and thereafter are tentative or over-demanding with the passive post-16 pupils they face. It is crucial to the development of effective post-16 teaching skills that mentors are more empowered to integrate post-16 teaching into their training programme.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Results of Data Analysis: Mentoring conceptualised as support and challenge**

There can be little doubt that students need mentor support as they are trained to become effective post-16 teachers. It is my contention they need the elusive strategy of challenge too. Although many researchers have looked at the relationship between students and mentors, none has yet produced a definitive argument for the value in practice of challenge as a mentor strategy. Post-16 teaching may provide the ideal context.

In this section analysis of the data reveals an argument about what it is that student teachers need from their mentor as they learn to teach post-16. There have been many prescriptions about mentoring in the literature (e.g McIntyre et al, 1993, Tomlinson, 1995, Portner, 1998). These can be balanced by some recognition that mentoring is difficult, with descriptions of the limited time available for mentoring (Haggarty, 1995b, Hoyer, 1996) and the relative rarity of challenge being used as a training strategy by mentors (Elliott and Calderhead, 1995, Jacques, 1995, Hawkey, 1997, McNally and Martin, 1998). There have been no specific references to mentoring processes specific to post-16 classroom practices. It is interesting that four key themes emerge from the data.

First, and echoing tentative findings from my pilot research, is the limited access students have to post-16 teaching as arranged by their mentor. Second is what might be called the DIY approach many students are forced to take to their post-16 teaching. Third is the division in mentor assumptions of training needs between subject knowledge and classroom management post-16. Finally, descriptions of effective mentoring in the post-16 phase are described, offering a model for future mentoring practice.

### **Limited Access to post-16 teaching: a mentor management problem**

The pilot stage of this research found evidence to suggest some students experienced a very limited involvement in post-16 teaching in their partner schools, due to the particular context of the school in which practice was undertaken. This is understandable given the pressures on busy schools, and the

weight of the ITT Standards which are perceived as prioritising 11-16 teaching competence. It also, however, reflects an unwillingness in some schools, some departments or by some individual teachers to 'give up' their high status A level teaching to enable a student to practice. If understandable, it is also unhelpful to students conscious of the demands post-16 teaching places on their preparation, subject knowledge and assessment strategies. Limited access to post-16 classrooms appears to add to the already stressful experience of learning to teach, and makes the prospect of post-16 teaching as a newly qualified teacher intimidating. As students nearing, or actually at the end of their course comment:

*Having little experience of post-16 means it is daunting...I'm still not really aware of the expectations and of my own subject knowledge...the depth that you need to know things before you can confidently teach astute post-16 pupils.*  
(Telerecorded interview 2)

*I don't think it's enough. I feel as though I've just chipped the edge off...I would like to do more of it.* (Group interview 1).

It is not just the general difficulty of access reported. There are also specific problems with post-16 experience limited to one school in terms of socialisation (Whitehead, 1995). This was not an uncommon experience for students in this study, as a number of local education authorities in England have organised schooling into a predominantly tertiary system with 11-16 schools and sixth form colleges. Such students were forced by circumstance to engage with post-16 teaching in only one school, often for only four weeks. This was not reported as providing a broad preparation for the use of flexible teaching strategies post-16. Placement limited to a single school for the post-16 experience also did little for the problematising of subject knowledge ideologies (Dart and Drake, 1993). Both could become significant issues if mentor involvement is 'hands-off' post-16, or if alternative areas of the post-16 curriculum are denied to students.



*I taught post-16 only on Teaching in Another School. My mentor gave me no help on this at all...I seemed to be overlooked. (e-questionnaire 8)*

*My mentor "spared" me the task of being involved in GNVQ Communications. I gathered the English department did not appreciate having to do this. (e-questionnaire 11)*

On the latter comment, it appears to have been the micro-politics of school department structures which have limited the post-16 opportunities available to this student. Given that school teachers are not trained pre-service to deliver what are reported in many schools as growth areas of the post-16 curriculum like GNVQ Media and Communications, it is questionable whether an appropriate model exists to support and develop effective vocational teaching in schools. In this particular case, the mentor does not seem to have been willing, or able, to act in what might have been perceived to be in the student's best career interests, especially given the previous professional backgrounds of many OU students. Instead, the adherence has been to a single academic discipline model of training for post-16 teaching.

In the schools themselves, some mentors were alert to the underplaying of their training role in relation to the post-16 experience.

*In schools perhaps we do take our sixth form teaching too much for granted because pupils doing A levels want to be there. (Mentor, school visit 1)*

*With a student teacher, it is not the same as starting off a Year 12 group in September...there is an attitude towards sixth form teaching in schools that means giving a group over to a student teacher is quite awkward...it is a status thing. (Mentor, school visit 3)*

The comment about the status of A level teaching is further amplification of the conundrum student teachers find themselves in with respect to post-16 teaching. There is not much time or space in a packed course of ITT to access post-16 teaching. What opportunities there are often depend upon a teacher's willingness to 'give up' something they enjoy and which provides status and symbolic value within the department, the school and in the outside community through published league tables of A level results.

However, it does seem a dereliction in a mentor's training role if access to post-16 teaching is made unnecessarily difficult, or if mere lip service is paid to a cursory experience of post-16 teaching. Not all students, in the context of training in a partner school, will be assertive enough to claim it as an entitlement:

*I'm fairly upfront...I pushed post-16 teaching as an issue and  
I was able to do it. (e-questionnaire 2)*

It is not good enough that a student's experience of post-16 teaching depends on such a hit and miss (Haggarty, 1995b) approach from mentors. It has been established that the mentoring a student receives is dependent upon the individual and idiosyncratic conceptualisation the mentor possesses of the role (Martin, 1997). It would seem that a conceptualisation which includes an active involvement with students learning to teach in the post-16 classroom is needed before a more consistent approach is universally adopted.

### **A touch of DIY: the student and post-16 teaching**

The problem for student teachers is not simply one of being able to access sufficient post-16 teaching. Equally important is the quality of training the mentor can provide related to that post-16 teaching. For many students in this study, mentor involvement post-16 was at best 'hands-off', at worst invisible and non-existent.

*I have not come across any particular help with post-16 teaching and I would be glad of more guidance. (msg 2 in e-conference)*

*It was difficult to find time for discussion on post-16 issues. (e-questionnaire 8)*

*I have to say that you're more or less left to your own devices. (participant in group interview 1)*

This DIY approach to learning to teach post-16 would be unacceptable in the 11-16 phase of ITT. How are students to improve their skills and develop their understanding in post-16 classrooms without active mentor involvement? Strategies that mentors use as standard practice in their training role pre-16 appear, in many cases, absent post-16. Explicit mentor involvement is vital for a number of reasons:

*Post-16 pupils do not take readily to new faces, especially at A level...so a grant of authority from my mentor would have speeded up rapport and removed suspicion earlier. (e-questionnaire 9)*

*None of my King Lear lessons was observed, as they had been specially scheduled for me...it would have been helpful to have the Shakespeare lessons observed...I would have appreciated an observation to ensure that I was on the right track. (e-questionnaire 1)*

*There was some challenge about expectations, ie you will need to work at getting them involved...but no advice on how, and presented with a model of class teacher struggling too. (participant in group interview 2)*

Opportunities to develop a warm trusting relationship with post-16 pupils, and a perfectly proper wish to have a mentor acknowledge that what was being planned and executed was appropriate, do not seem too much for students to expect in relation to their post-16 teaching experience. It is also unhelpful to have a mentor take a very informal, surface interest in what a student is doing in the post-16 classroom. Effective training requires an ongoing dialogue about whether post-16 learners' needs are going to be met by planned strategies, and shared evaluation after each lesson.

*I took my mentor's sixth form class...his attitude was get as far as you can, and I'll just take over from there...he seemed to think I should be working out the strategies myself rather than him telling me...if I asked him he would turn the question around and ask "what do you think you could do?"...he was worried that he didn't want to push his views totally across on mine...but giving me ideas doesn't necessarily mean he is spoonfeeding me...I might not use his strategies but it's useful to have some point of comparison from a variety of teachers. (Telerecorded interview 2)*

Mentor involvement post-16 is vital to provide a sounding board, a resource bank and an experienced insight into what is effective, just as mentors would be expected to do pre-16. The absence of both support and challenge could push some students into the retreat/withdrawal phase (Daloz, 1986) simply because of a misconception that post-16 teaching is somehow less important in training terms and not worth prioritising. It is also unhelpful training to always have queries thrown back at an inexperienced student:

*My mentor just asked questions...this was not what I wanted.*  
(participant in group interview 2)

A sense of trust and dialogue seems not to have been established in this relationship. This could be a critical failing on the mentor's part, for without

affirmation and empathy there can be no trust (Daloz, 1986), and so any perceived challenge is uncomfortable to the student. It seems as if even the importance of the mentor listening (Martin, 1996) has been overlooked in this instance, resulting in a dissatisfied and uncomfortable student. Conversely:

*All my mentor assistance has been through asking...if I feel I need assistance I've asked for it...you have to manage the process. I feel almost guilty. (Student, school visit 1)*

The sense of guilt about demands on a mentor's time was a relatively common one amongst the participants in this study. However, students appear to want the same model of generally supportive and engaged mentoring they have experienced in their 11-16 training, but when there are differences they are not always welcome:

*With my sixth form teaching there is a different model of mentoring. My mentor intervenes in lessons. Lower down the school that would be a sensitive issue because of losing face. (Student, school visit 2)*

Such explicit intervention is an interesting model of collaborative practice, but this remark did come from a student on her final teaching practice (80% solo teaching). It was unclear whether the student regarded this as appropriate training, even in the more open context of a post-16 classroom. The sensibilities of the power relationship between mentor and student surface in this example, as emphasised in Stanulis and Russell (2000). It may well be difficult for the student to manage that sort of challenge.

## **False Mentor assumptions: training needs post-16**

Analysis of the data suggests two significant areas that mentors could choose to focus on in their training role with students as they learn to teach post-16. The first, prioritised in the Standards, is subject knowledge. This is important because, without an appropriate depth of subject knowledge relevant to the particular A level syllabus studied, student teachers will lack confidence in the post-16 classroom and be unsure how to deal with subject related question from pupils. However, in this study there were relatively few reports of mentors challenging their students over post-16 subject knowledge, (which is in itself unsurprising given the hands-off approach many mentors took to post-16 teaching). Both the regulating bodies, OfSTED and the TTA seem too reliant on the content of a student's degree as an indicator of subject knowledge, and offer insufficiently fine grained guidance on how a student will use that subject knowledge to plan for appropriately differentiated post-16 teaching. When prompted to reflect, mentors in this study were able to articulate their concerns as practitioners:

*Time and time again you have not actually to decide what you are going to teach, you look at who you are teaching first and then you choose a syllabus appropriate...and then you choose the approach to teach that syllabus and text suitable for those candidates. You do not say I am familiar with text x and by hook or crook I am going to teach that. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

*At sixth form level the focus tends to be not so much on classroom management, discipline, more on subject knowledge...almost a latent feeling that as long as subject knowledge is secure, there is no reason really to go too deeply into that...but a lot of what sixth form teaching is about is how you differentiate your knowledge...and making that accessible to the kids...a degree is seen as a benchmark*

*of subject knowledge, but degrees these days don't tend to have a common core. (Mentor, school visit 3)*

This is a valuable reminder that students still need training from their mentor in what to do with their subject knowledge in order to ensure effective, differentiated teaching.

Second, issues of classroom management post-16 would appear to be markedly different from the worries about discipline in relation to the Standards in some 11-16 teaching. However, it is necessary that competence in planning strategies is demonstrated by engaging all pupils in a post-16 class. This is imperative if, as many trainee English teachers seem to favour, the main strategy post-16 is a reliance on oral responses to open discussion of texts. Students need to be trained how to take account of their post-16 learners' needs.

*My mentor pretty much let me get on with it. He did observe a couple of lessons but his comments were mostly about class management, ie how to get all the class to respond, rather than the subject matter. (e-questionnaire 4)*

Even with active mentor involvement this focus on effective teaching strategies post-16 is not always easy to achieve. There can be tensions between the mentor and other class teachers post-16 over syllabus and assessment demands and what they mean for appropriate strategies.

*My mentor was very enthusiastic about my strategies but the class teacher was concerned about covering the syllabus in time for a January exam. There was a conflict here ...I had expectations that were probably too high initially. (e-questionnaire 5)*

Here is evidence of narrow assessment considerations (Richardson, 1993, Higham, 1996) limiting training opportunities post-16. There can also be

difficulties if the mentor does not share the same discipline interest, or even does not have experience of teaching particular syllabuses:

*On TLAS I received a lot of support from the English Language teacher, but my mentor did not teach that so I did not get any from him...I wonder how a mentor would have time to cover A level Language and A level Literature?*  
(Telerecorded interview 3)

There might also be areas of training in which the professional dimension comes to the fore in a mentor's role:

*A level or post-16 is very different. The rapport is different between the pupil and the member of staff...it's a very fine line between being authoritarian and being their best friend...the smallness creates lots of problems in sociability and in-fighting within the group...the problem is those skills aren't necessarily totally transferable to another situation and therefore you have to be very adaptable...you have to wean them back on task...post-16 pupils are very close, almost emotionally involved with their teachers, they quickly lose confidence if their teacher is absent. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

This is a valuable reminder that Year 12 pupils in particular are not always robustly independent in their learning. Often they will be reliant for their developing intellectual confidence on a trusting relationship with their post-16 teacher. When a student is working with them, that student is likely to need guidance from the mentor on how firm or how relaxed to be in task management to ensure an approach that is neither weak and over-friendly or unnecessarily teacher-led.



## Effective mentoring post-16: evidence of support and challenge

In spite of the evidence that some mentors fail to give the requisite attention to post-16 teaching in their training role, there is data which illustrates effective mentoring specifically tailored for this phase. In providing a compelling model of good practice, several key themes emerge from the analysis.

First, is the benefit for mentor and student of engaging in pre-placement discussions to establish the strengths on which a student might draw for their post-16 teaching.

*My mentor selected areas to enable me to draw on my background in marketing (Media stylistics to Language groups) and Elizabethan poetry (practical criticism to the Literature groups) to help me feel confident, so I think that was really supportive of her. (e-conference message 4)*

This can give confidence to the student and provides a much stronger starting point for post-16 practice.

Second, this sort of close, sensitive attentive dialogue (Tomlinson, 1995, Portner, 1998) is valuable when carried through to pre-lesson discussions in the post-16 setting, whether with the mentor or with another class teacher.

*Very helpful observation and feedback. About 45 minutes discussion beforehand for me to assure her I could do this alone rather than as co-teaching. (e-questionnaire 10)*

*Discussed with usual A level teacher, who was not in this case my mentor, prior to collaborative lesson on exam technique in response to a mock paper I had marked and commented on. (e-questionnaire 1)*

This sort of purposeful talk (Cochran-Smith and Paris, 1995) can contribute to enhancing collaborative approaches to post-16 teaching during training, either as preparation for solo teaching, or simply enabling the student to get a feel for the right level. This seems good mentor practice and could be especially useful in illuminating an area of teaching that many students in this study have admitted is problematic: post-16 assessment.

*Assessment at this stage is quite murky water so it was very nice to be able to work with someone who could see the sort of work that I have contributed to and point me in the direction of the grades. (Participant in group interview 1)*

The significance of discussion with mentors, or other class teachers as appropriate, is particularly pressing if students have experienced problems in their post-16 teaching. Without mentor involvement, ineffective strategies could go unchallenged and unreflected upon. Unaided, students could struggle to become effective post-16 teachers.

*I discussed (lack of confidence of some pupils) with teachers, and they suggested strategies for ensuring that all pupils were included, ie setting them a small topic of research on which they had to prepare outlines, draft, make a presentation and then share their essays with the rest of the group. The fact that they had done so much research and could read from their essays gave the shy amongst them more confidence. (e-questionnaire 2)*

*I met with the two Year 12 teachers and discussed pupil strengths and whether it was realistic for them to continue and how we could work with them. It was very useful...otherwise I just felt that I was the only one who was having a disastrous time...we did discuss strategies quite a lot. (Participant in group interview 1)*

It seems to be the breadth and detail of mentor input related to specific strategies that students most value in their post-16 training.

The approach to mentoring is described very differently by some students, who have engaged with a mentor who has consciously and explicitly allowed them a free rein with their post-16 teaching:

*Whilst at first I felt completely in at the deep end, I appreciated having a free rein with the pupils. My mentor was always available for help if I needed it, but otherwise kept out of my planning, which gave me confidence. (e-questionnaire 3)*

*My mentor challenges me by stepping back and giving me opportunity. She gives me the challenge of allowing me to sort something out...by minimal intervention. (Student, school visit 1)*

Intriguingly, this is viewed positively by these students as confidence building. Yet, as one mentor remarked:

*I see my job as a mentor is to give them a structure to work from...we can't leave students alone just to do their own thing because how are they going to learn? (Mentor, school visit 2)*

The important consideration is that mentoring be appropriate to the individual student's needs, and that this need should be a negotiated one. As a minimum entitlement, a student should expect to enter into an agreement with a mentor (Portner, 1998). No student is going to gain more from being thrown in at the deep end of post-16 teaching unaided, than from support from a mentor offering structured training in the post-16 classroom. Indeed some participants in this study were able to articulate positive perceptions of the role of challenge in a

mentor's armoury when engaged with training the student to teach post-16 effectively. Most significant is that the context in which the mentoring relationship operates should be positive and respectful rather than negative, judgmental or dictatorial.

*Most trainees who are keen and committed will almost move themselves on...we will discuss various strategies and ideas...I might suggest she go and observe other teachers...I would rather people found out things for themselves through a quite structured support...a positive way ahead rather than a confrontational one. (Mentor, school visit 1)*

*Challenge: I might say you've really got to do something about those people who interrupt inside the group...you've got to do something about your voice, you've got to do something about ending the lessons, you've got to do something about stopping those pupils from going out of the room before you've finished talking to them...but not in a dictatorial way. (Mentor, school visit 2)*

Another significant element is that the mentor focuses on specifics, drawing on observation of post-16 teaching issues:

*My mentor did run through quite a few things about teaching in sixth form because when she first observed me, keeping pupils on task in groupwork and appropriate timings came up as something I was awkward about. (Student, school visit 4)*

Interestingly, when I observed this student teach a Year 12 lesson during my research visit, I noted her strengths were that her questioning techniques were very encouraging. If her initial open questions did not get the level of response she wanted, she persisted with more closed questions. She did admit to me her

model of a teacher was based on the lead character in the film *Dead Poet's society*. This may suggest her mentor had a particularly challenging training role, although the evidence available to me suggested effectiveness on both sides. Similarly:

*I worked closely with my mentor on a Hamlet sequence and was intensively observed...there was more input on teaching strategies as subject knowledge was secure...challenge, when it came, was on group discussion strategies. (Telerecorded interview 5)*

Additionally, willingness on the mentor's part to take on challenging areas of the professional role inherent in training to be a teacher can be important. A powerful example of the need for mentor challenge came in the form of a student who was "rubbing colleagues up the wrong way". This is a difficult area of mentor/mentee relationships, when the professional dimension impacts and the experienced practitioner in the partner school needs to intervene:

*Student teachers need sensitivity, you are in a working environment and it's team work, you need allies, you need support...I gave pointers on two or three occasions. It wasn't particularly successful...I then had to be much more blunt and much more specific about certain issues. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

This is not to argue that overt challenge is the only way for a mentor to move a student on. The point is that this student needed to be prompted to think afresh (Dalo, 1986), or to be offered alternative thinking (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997) if the move from one stage to the next (Open University, 1995) was going to be facilitated. Interestingly, some evidence was provided of mentors offering alternative post-16 teaching strategies for students to try out:

*I talk about other strategies, perhaps suggest she tries another strategy, just to see how it goes...often student teachers are lacking in that range of strategies, they don't have very much to fall back on, they can't have the experience to recognise, in a classroom situation, when to move from one strategy to the next. (Mentor, school visit 3)*

Equally important is the positive encouragement to observe other teachers in action post-16 by building on other department and school resources:

*I would recommend serious observation of a number of post-16 teachers, presumably in previous practices...post-16 pupils are the consumers rather than being in the normal run of compulsory education and therefore the student should see the house style to work in that particular placement...one of the areas that would work well is tutorial time with a post-16 group. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

The value of role modelling and the benefits of ad hoc mentoring in which learning is by gradual immersion should also be noted:

*My mentor has mentored me by example and behaving by example...her interactions with me at her side, has taught me by osmosis how to behave in certain situations... The ad hoc conversations, observations that would turn into a 10 minute conversation have been more valuable than the formal mentor sessions...analysing what happens on the spot, happens on the walk between classrooms. (Student, school visit 1)*

These strategies are not necessarily easy for the busy mentor. A number of studies (Benton, 1990, Hoye, 1996, Kerry and Farrow, 1996) have reported on the time pressure mentors are under, which has a negative effect on their

capacity to perform the role effectively. For new, first-time mentors, enhanced training in the processes of effective mentoring (Martin, 1996) would have made the experience of the students in this study more positive. Indeed, the taken for granted nature of attitudes towards post-16 teaching appears to offer a valuable setting for mentor deconstruction of the teaching performance in training.

*I have had to break down those terribly subtle things that go into post-16 teaching into something that's almost formal, so that the student can understand what is going on...to make it transparent was hardest in Stage 1, when I had not broken down what I did for years and years. That was the most fascinating part for me...breaking down what I did ...Pupils see the value of the student teacher's approach, and they start to see the value of the established teacher's approach. They actually see the value of there being more than one way of doing things...it wasn't my choice to mentor. I was asked to do it. I value it now enormously. It's been a terrific experience for me, enhanced my teaching, enhanced my management skills, actually done me good as a person. It is very much a symbiotic relationship. It is not something where the student milks you dry...or it shouldn't be. (Mentor, school visit 4)*

Two points need to be made explicit. If the benefits to the mentor of a pro-active role with the student's post-16 classes could be made clearer to partner schools, training issues around post-16 teaching might be tackled more effectively. Also, if the potential advantages to post-16 pupils of encountering new approaches and up to date subject knowledge could be communicated more persuasively, the result might be that post-16 teaching in schools emerges from its hidden garden.

## Conclusion

Mentoring is advocated as the most effective way to train teachers in the ITT regulations (DfEE, 1998) and much of the literature (e.g Wilkin and Sankey, 1994). Mentors have become an integral and crucial element in ITT over the last decade. However, it would appear from this data that mentoring is inconsistent in relation to students' need to learn to teach post-16. Very little guidance is offered to mentors about the specific training needs of post-16 teaching.

Some mentors manage only very limited post-16 access for their students, missing the opportunity to open up a hidden aspect of teaching as advocated by Graham, (1997). Others arrange a reasonable amount of post-16 teaching but take a hands-off approach to the mentoring. This reflects the "laissez-faire" mentor described by McNally and Martin (1998) and the difficulty of mentoring outlined by Hawkey (1996). When mentors do engage with the post-16 experience, there is still some contention about whether they focus their attention on subject knowledge or classroom management strategies. This dilemma rehearses the problems raised in Arthur et al (1997) and Goodwyn (1997) and offers some confirmation to the allegation that mentors reinforce traditional pedagogies (Aaronsohn, 1996) in the case of post-16.

On my research visits, the observation of general mentor/student interactions suggested students craved a dialogue based on the Standards, whereas experienced mentors do not. It is apparent that few mentors are setting targets as part of formative assessment, in relation to post-16 teaching. Mentors might be worried that anything associated with an assessment role (Stark, 1994) destroys the working relationship with the student. The conclusion to be drawn is that, in order that a valuable training resource is not wasted, mentors should be diligent in not dominating formal mentor sessions (Haggarty, 1995a) and students should be trained to make the most of them by asking why as well as how (Zanting, 2001).



What does emerge of a positive nature is the value to students of effective mentoring, including pre-placement and pre-lesson discussions related to post-16 teaching issues, and post-lesson support. This confirms the thrust of Martin's (1996) argument about active mentoring. While some students were happy to be given a free rein, other students and mentors were able to describe the positive aspects of more challenging mentoring. The essential problem with the free rein approach is that it dispenses with any notion of a mentor vision of where the student is going in their training (Daloz, 1986) and thus loses any direction and structure. The value of informal mentoring contact also emerges. Significantly, the importance of the mentoring role for a new mentor is emphasised, as is the benefit to post-16 pupils of student teacher input.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Results of Data Analysis: English as an exemplification of the need for mentoring post-16**

English teaching post-16 offers fruitful ground for challenging mentor/student interactions. The literature suggests two important areas of potential conflict. First is the position adopted in the debate over subject knowledge. Important questions are: what is the appropriate canon for post-16 pupils? What competing standpoints are battling for control of English as a post-16 school subject? Second is the debate over pedagogy: what are effective teaching strategies for post-16 English? What of differentiation post-16? How can teachers take account of pupils' cultural capital and the level of challenge presented to them in KS 4 English? Is there a clash between didactic traditions post-16 and a desire to value learner autonomy?

These twin strands, subject knowledge and pedagogy, are inextricably linked, because a student's view of what is valuable in English post-16 will influence their choice of strategies when planning teaching. As such, mentor involvement would appear to be vital in training students so that the two come together in effective synergy. Previous studies have suggested differing levels of English mentor engagement with issues around subject knowledge. Davies (1993) reported mentors avoiding the contentious nature of English in secondary schools, while Drake and Dart (1994) reported mentor awareness of the discrepancy between literature based English degrees and the secondary English curriculum. Goodwyn (1997) advocates mentor openness about English subject beliefs, but is unable to report directly on examples in the post-16 phase.

It seems relevant that this study set out to discover if mentors and students are able to discuss the nature of English subject knowledge post-16 and if there is evidence of mentors working with students to offer guidance in appropriate teaching strategies for the range of pupils to be found in post-16 English classes.

Two main and two minor issues emerge from the data. I will begin by discussing the general disappointment expressed by many students on first teaching Year 12 English Literature A level. I will look at three factors: the

pupils; the mentors and the students themselves. Second, the challenge of teaching A level English Language to Year 12 pupils will be analysed, again focussing on three key factors: the pupils, the mentors and the students. I will then draw more briefly on the potential connections for English teachers post-16 with other courses, and the value to English departments of student teachers bringing new approaches to the post-16 classroom.

### **The big leap: A level English Literature Year 12 pupils**

Student teachers in this study expressed surprise and disappointment at the lack of technical language, at the weak critical skills, and at the narrow cultural capital displayed by Year 12 pupils. They had assumed all three would be far more advanced. This was a particular revelation, since these English PGCE students judged skills of critical analysis, informed by an appropriate technical vocabulary and a degree of cultural awareness, vital for success in A level. They may be right in this, given the agreement with Daw's (1996) analysis of successful A level English departments. The need for differentiation post-16 was a jolt to many students. For example:

*I was surprised by the amount of differentiation within the A level class. With poetry in particular the pupils were not comfortable with basic technical terms. Maybe A level has a mystique which makes them uncomfortable voicing their opinions...it was certainly surprising how much prompting and encouragement they needed. (e-conference msg 4)*

In particular, the limited range of critical vocabulary possessed by the pupils who had, less than a year previously, succeeded at GCSE English Literature was disconcerting.

*I was surprised how little Year 12 knew in terms of technical language and in terms of how to express themselves when they were doing practical criticism...I had to make more*

*allowances than I'd gone in expecting to make. (Participant in group interview 1)*

The issue of cultural capital raised by Daw (1996) was also significant. Student expectations were regularly dashed as they assumed a quasi-undergraduate level of broad cultural knowledge.

*I wanted to do a challenging piece of practical criticism with the Year 12 pupils...I read the passage through to the class and asked what it reminded them of...but they were incapable of answering my questions and the level of their response bumped me right down to earth...I had assumed a huge bank of knowledge...it made me question when I had got all those cultural references...had I forgotten what it was like in Year 12? (Telerecorded interview 5)*

The mentors interviewed for this study all agreed that student teachers and NQTs often make assumptions about post-16 levels, equating them more to undergraduate English students. Unfortunately, this misreading seems not to be challenged by mentors early enough. Student responses suggest an absence of effective pre-placement discussion or guided observation from mentors to train student beliefs in a more realistic direction. Students also reported being dismayed and surprised by the lack of motivation and maturity on display in the post-16 classroom, expecting far greater sophistication in learner orientation.

*I was surprised by the differences in pupils and their attitude to the A level...from those who opted for English without any real interest in the subject to those who read well above and beyond the texts. (e-conference msg 26)*

*I thought having chosen to stay on, Year 12 wouldn't be able to stop themselves in A English. (Student, school visit 1)*

The crucial point here is that students need to be made far more aware, whether by the course materials or their mentor, that GCSE can provide for many pupils an inadequate foundation in the skills required for success in A Literature. Success at A level is reported as being closely correlated to the challenge of the GCSE experience. An extended reading culture is particularly suggested as being more important than any induction at the start of A level (Daw, 1996). The expected level of motivation, and the assumed love of the subject were also reported as absent in a number of pupils encountered. The effect of this was to discourage the students, as they were not prepared for both passivity and immaturity in their post-16 classes.

*A lot of the pupils have come to the sixth form with grade C English combined and this means the leap to A level is a big one. (e-conference msg 18)*

*I feel strongly that pupils should be made aware of different study skills required for A level English...which many obviously see as an easy option...GCSE does not guarantee even a pass at A level...such a different approach is needed. (e-questionnaire 2)*

Without mentor support in this problematic area, students were forced to find their own strategies to attempt to teach post-16 literature effectively:

*For A level poetry I had to take ideas from a resource pack aimed at GCSE poetry...what I had been doing previously was really a line-by-line analysis...but there are all sorts of gaps in cultural and emotional experience of pupils in Year 12. (Telerecorded interview 4)*

This leap from GCSE to A level study is recognised by mentors as a huge one. The impact of this gap is profound on the Year 12 pupils, with many reported as struggling to cope with the analytical skills and cultural reference points

apparently necessary for A level success. Of critical importance for this research, though, is the pressure it places on student teachers, invariably encountering a Year 12 class on their initial engagement with post-16 teaching. Many students reported being destabilised after first teaching Year 12 English classes.

Because many students had their sole post-16 teaching experience with Year 12, they were unable to see the intellectual and affective developments that take place for many pupils over the course of two years. Being able to reflect upon a Year 13 class would have been helpful. However, few students reported being able to access Year 13, which was almost always regarded as sacrosanct by the class teacher and the school, mindful perhaps of the impact in the local community of A level grades. Davies (1993) reports this access is different in every school context.

Few student teachers in this study benefited from early enough mentor discussion of post-16 issues, which might have mitigated the near trauma caused by over-expectations being dashed. Without that pro-active, hands-on mentoring, many students have struggled to develop appropriately differentiated post-16 teaching strategies. Too often, student teacher learning in the post-16 English context appears unguided and unstructured for the trainee, and thus haphazard. Mentors could, were they able to take post-16 teaching more seriously, do much in their training to prepare students with the strategies to bridge that Year 11/Year 12 gap to the benefit of Year 12 pupil learning.

### **The mentor factor: “Can’t see the wood for the trees”**

There are two specific factors which have emerged from the data which appear to offer practical help to English mentors to fulfil their training role post-16 more effectively. First is in text selection: which books will Year 12s be studying when the student teacher comes in?

*I feel that teachers should choose texts from the syllabus that our pupils are going to understand and be able to perform with to the best of their ability. (e-conference msg 7)*

This is an obvious but important point. A poorly chosen text (usually an over-ambitious choice given the range of pupils in the class) can lead to problems with differentiation and tensions with pupils' lack of cultural capital. PGCE students are under great pressure during periods of teaching practice. Post-16 teaching adds to that pressure, requiring, as is reported in this study, intensive preparation, heavy marking and little feedback in terms of pupil response. This pressure is exacerbated if the choice of A' text is problematic:

*With English, I think it is very much the text you are asked to do as a student or an NQT...if it's one I am familiar with, I would have no problem with it...but if it is something I am not so familiar with...I would feel very uneasy about it, with insufficient time to prepare...sort of thrown in at the deep end. (Student, school visit 3)*

This example is enhanced by the evidence from my observation of this student's teaching of a Year 12 Practical Criticism class. I noted she was effective in underlining the relevance of critical skills to the pupils' forthcoming examinations, but much less sure whether to intervene with pupil's mispronunciations when reading, or in planning for discussion tasks which erred on depth rather than breadth. She was anxious about the texts she was expected to teach. This suggests a need for what Goodwyn (1997) calls an experiential framework, so the mentor training can challenge but not overwhelm.

The pressure on student teachers is made even worse if mentor support is unforthcoming:



*With Chaucer we had to work through the text line by line...I've tried to use video and a theatre performance....some pupils found the strategies too close to Year 11 work...any ideas I got from other students in the electronic conference. (Telerecorded interview 2)*

Poor or inappropriate text selection might also lead to the second factor: a fall back to traditional, transmission models of teaching to mitigate the lack of pupil responses. Daw (1996) noted that successful departments chose syllabuses and texts appropriate to their pupils' needs. However:

*A level teaching reverts to far more traditional methods than GCSE or KS 3, e.g Shakespeare teaching post-16 is far more centred on the text and on 'academic' aspects.*  
(e-conference msg 9)

If student teachers are forced into adopting a more traditional approach to their post-16 teaching as a deficit model (as, for example in "my Year 12 pupils don't know anything about x, so I have to lecture") the result is to deny post-16 pupils a range of learning opportunities. There is evidence that it is the weaker pupils who will suffer (Daw, 1996). The situation is compounded if students emulate existing traditional practice as observed in their partner school (described in MacFarlane, 1993, Rainbow, 1993). They are then unable to practice the skills they will need as NQTs and beyond.

*I think one of the keys to effective teaching post-16 is getting pupils to think, and not to spoon-feed them. They have to be taught how to prioritise material, to analyse rather than simply narrate...essay writing skills that they have not come across before. That's very difficult to teach them...a lot of new teachers to A level just concentrate on going through a text, without teaching them these thinking skills...trainees can't see the wood for the trees. They perhaps get bogged*

*down...it takes Year 12 pupils a good year before they start to develop these skills...weaker ones don't acquire them without being taught. (Mentor, school visit 1)*

This is another example of a mentor's ability to articulate professional knowledge about post-16 English teaching when prompted by a researcher. There was little evidence in this study of mentors presenting this depth of insight into the problems of post-16 teaching to their students. It is regrettable that any imbalance in the approach students take to their post-16 teaching is rarely challenged by mentors as an integral aspect of the training role.

One hypothetical example from English would be a student focusing on the A level literature text as canonical knowledge rather than facilitating the process-related analytical skills development Year 12 pupils require. This would reflect the English PGCE students described in Dart and Drake (1996) who espoused love for subject and a passion for literature. On this evidence Year 12 pupils would have benefitted from mentor intervention in student planning post-16. This unwillingness to intervene might confirm Davies' (1993) description of mentors failing to connect subject ideology and classroom practice in English. The extreme example would be the student who, after her final teaching practice, queried:

*How do you fill two hour lessons with a range of constructive activities to keep A' English pupils engaged? (Telerecorded interview 3)*

This sort of observation is worrying for three reasons. First, the student has completed 18 weeks in school, seemingly without observing, or experiencing herself, a well-planned and well executed post-16 English lesson. Given the weighting attached to demonstrating competence 11-16, her PGCE result would, almost certainly, have been unaffected. Second, she will start teaching as an NQT with no confidence in what strategies will work effectively to develop learning in the post-16 classroom. Third, the effect on her own

professional self-image, and the post-16 pupils she will teach, could be negative. The professional image of English teachers is closely bound up with deeply held beliefs about subject knowledge, and this student had that knocked by her experience learning to teach post-16. If repeated in other contexts, this is unlikely to help teacher retention and is unlikely to aid any improvement in post-16 standards.

### **The student factor: the pressure to adapt**

Arthur et al (1997) report on the importance of departmental cultures for ITT students on placement learning to teach. The prevailing ethos of English teaching can be a powerful one. It is thus interesting that the evidence from this data suggested many students were seeking to adapt their view of English teaching to that of the department in which they were training.

*They are fairly traditional in their approach here, so I found it quite easy coming and picking up what they do...I observed one sixth form lesson and it was exactly like how I would go about it. (Student, school visit 3)*

*Neither partner school had a coherent, explicit view of English...individual teachers tended to do different things...I was happy to go along with the handbook. (Telerecorded interview 5)*

*In one school there was a far more structured approach to English covering the technicalities and concentrating on technique...I soon adapted to that and it was fine. (Student, school visit 5)*

In my visit to the latter student's school, I observed a Year 12 lesson in which an explicit link was made to what had been taught in a previous lesson. She had also been trained to ask a question in a different way if initially she was greeted

with no response. She was quite happy to fit in with the norms of that department.

However, there can be problems with this approach, particularly if the student feels constrained by the post-16 context in which they are working.

*Just because one English teacher teaches successfully in a certain way post-16 that certainly is not the only way...if you copy one person with a particular style because it works for them that doesn't guarantee it's going to work for you...that could be quite difficult for students. (Mentor, school visit 1)*

This would suggest, students are less than clear on how they should be developing their own views of and skills in post-16 English teaching in relation to their mentors. However, it also goes some way to confirming the literature (Davies, 1993) that English mentors shy away from challenging conversations about the nature of English. There was also limited data illustrating evidence of a student stumbling across tension in the micropolitics of a school's English department, which resulted in her being unable to draw on her own expertise:

*I found the utilisation of contextual knowledge on an historical/biographical basis was acceptable for one teacher but not the other...this reflected the personal approaches of the teacher...I felt I had a lot to offer in this area from my degree, but was quickly 'kicked into touch' by my mentor. (e-conference msg 25)*

The message for student teachers as they learn to teach post-16 thus seems to be a simple one: know your text (this is endorsed in Daw, 1996) and know your pupils. However, this is very difficult to achieve without mentor involvement.

Another significant theme in the data collected was the urgent need for mentors to train in those strategies to help develop independent academic skills for struggling Year 12 English pupils.

*The main difficulty that I have found is bridging the gap between GCSE and A level, finding the right level to pitch things and getting a good balance of activities at the right level. (e-questionnaire 7)*

*My own experience was not very useful as I progressed from O level which seemed closer to A level as a learning model than GCSE...lack of motivation is a real problem with some post-16 pupils. (e-questionnaire 6)*

Wherever feedback on post-16 teaching comes from, student teachers require validation of their approach. If not targeted by the mentor, students reported on the value of feedback from the Year 12 pupils themselves:

*I was rather worried about getting Year 12 to move about in a workshop idea, thinking they might be 'too sophisticated' for this kind of lesson. However, I received a lot of positive feedback that the lesson had been 'different', more 'exciting' than usual. I therefore came away from the lesson determined to experiment a bit more with all my classes. (e-conference msg 18)*

In a sense, the most important element is the use students can make of feedback, whether from their mentor, or failing that, from the post-16 pupils they are teaching. However, mentor feedback should at least be framed in terms of the Standards, and should be supported with what Goodwyn (1997) calls "accurate empathy". Pupils are more likely to respond to a student teacher in terms of affective processes. The latter can be of value, but the former ought to be part of a developing dialogue about competency.

One undercurrent running through the data has been the recognition, from those students who were privileged enough to access Year 13 teaching, that Year 13 pupils taking English literature are significantly more mature and confident in their critical skills than their Year 12 counterparts. This is an important reminder, to those students struggling with ‘wooden’ Year 12 groups, that there is light at the end of the tunnel. What is regrettable is that so few students get to see this transformation, and that it is under-reported in the literature. If students did gain fuller access, they might be clearer in their understanding that Year 13 pupils possess these skills, not by some magical process associated with being in Year 13, but because they have been taught them in Year 12, and are able to apply what they have learned with greater sophistication.

### **The challenge of A level English Language teaching**

It was noteworthy that many students in this study reported A English Language as an increasingly popular option in school sixth forms, a growth which is not reflected or indeed supported in the OU PGCE English materials.

*In my partner school, A level English Language is more popular than Literature, and has grown considerably in the last few years. (e-conference msg 22)*

This is a significant finding in itself, because it suggests an important, new area with which trainee English teachers need to familiarise themselves. It is not an area recognised as important by OfSTED (1998a), pointing to the continuation of a view of post-16 teaching that it is about single discipline literature teaching in English. This is not only demonstrably untrue, but it is also one area of opportunity that could differentiate any search for a first teaching post. However, from a pupil’s perspective there seem many problems for student teachers and their mentors to wrestle with:

*I had problems motivating pupils to work more actively in exploring and analysing texts for A level English Language.*

*Lack of knowledge about language is a real problem. (e-questionnaire 4)*

*It was hard to get A English Language pupils to be enthusiastic and I felt that was a shame...some of them realised that wasn't what they wanted to do language for...it wasn't being taught like that. (Participant in group interview 1)*

Students quickly recognised that their Year 12 pupils had an inappropriate expectation about what English Language would be like at A level. Some students perceived it as a default subject, attracting pupils by drawing on enjoyment of creative and persuasive writing at GCSE. Recognition that this was an erroneous assumption affected pupil learning and pupil behaviour, again an issue not reflected in the literature on post-16. Equally, a severe deficit in the knowledge about language needed to cope with advanced grammatical structures disengaged many pupils. Many student teachers encountered primarily struggling pupils. This preponderance of what manifested itself as pupil passivity affected them in a negative way.

*I taught some A level English Language lessons...I did child language acquisition and then stylistic analysis. Difficult is not the word...the theory went down very badly. The leap between GCSE and A level is very difficult and I did feel ill equipped in terms of my use of terminology. It was time to start parts of speech with this class rather than start talking about modifiers...The class were basically using this as a fill in thinking little work would be required. How wrong they were! (e-conference msg 21)*

*Pupils hated A level English Language...it was a challenge to find stimulating ways of teaching it. It was differentiated by those pupils who could cope with grammar and those who*

*couldn't...there is very little input on the PGCE, which is not geared towards post-16, and even the little we do get is literature...I ended up doing an awful lot of reading around.*  
(Telerecorded interview 1)

So, not only did the PGCE course itself prove insufficient in offering effective teaching approaches to A English Language, but a lack of relevant hands-on mentoring forced students to do considerable additional preparation, largely unguided. This was not picked up by OfSTED (1998a), but needs addressing if students are to be trained effectively as A level English Language teachers.

Students were generally unable to describe effective mentor modelling of A level English Language teaching. It appears that many existing teachers encountered by students in this study have been educated predominantly in literature-based degrees, and as such do not possess the requisite subject knowledge to teach A' English Language with confidence. They are essentially operating as non-specialists. Davies (1993) acknowledges the variations in mentor subject paradigms, particularly for teachers with English degrees from the 1980s onwards, as cultural theory was accommodated alongside liberal humanism. But in this instance, students have been presented with models of traditional teacher directed methods which have offered little to students looking to be trained in best practice.

*There seems to be a lot of repetition in A' English language classes. Perhaps these are less innovative ways of teaching.*  
(e-questionnaire 7)

*There is a contrast in the department, post-16 teaching is a lot more relaxed, not as structured as KS 3 and 4, but teachers are anxious about language issues...they are less secure in their subject knowledge when teaching A English language. They resorted to lectures, timed essays, going over*



*essays...it wasn't as dynamic as lower down the school.*

(Telerecorded interview 3)

However, a potential conundrum was reported, in which a cycle of ineffective A English language teaching might continue unchecked unless PGCE courses, and partner mentors take the issue on:

*With A level English Language, teachers have not been trained to teach it enthusiastically.* (Student, school visit 2)

Data from students was permeated with their observations of an absence of enthusiasm around the pedagogy of A level English language teaching. There could be an important message here for policy makers if A English Language is to continue as a growth area: where are effective teachers to be found with both subject knowledge and pedagogic skills? How will they then contribute to the training of new teachers of A English Language?

For students, there is a clear split between the experience of those who themselves had a Linguistics degree, or one containing a lot of language content, and those, the majority, with a literature-based degree. Even for those students with a language background, significant personal effort had to be made to update that subject knowledge to match the requirements of A level English Language teaching.

*Although for the final two years of my degree I concentrated on language, I do feel it has not really prepared me for A level English Language and I have had to do extra reading.*  
(e-conference msg 22)

*It's quite a while since my English language degree... subject knowledge is something I've had to brush up on, especially for post-16 teaching.* (Telerecorded interview 1)

Conversely, some students received a confidence boost in their partner schools, by being welcomed as a post-16 language expert, and thus encouraged to do their own thing and play on the strengths of their subject knowledge.

*I had a very positive experience teaching A level English language to two sixth form groups. As a graduate in linguistics, it was an absolute delight to teach areas such as language and society. (e-conference msg 23)*

*Because I was teaching A English Language post-16 there was nothing to help me in the course materials...and all the teachers looked to me as a linguistics expert, which was a boost...the pupils had deliberately opted for English Language, but the teachers were using the same books as the pupils and the internet...updating their knowledge as the impact of literacy hour flows through. (Telerecorded interview 3)*

This is perhaps similar to the situation described in Goodwyn (1997) in which English students with IT expertise are greeted as experts by mentors lacking those skills. However, there are disadvantages to this model. Those students with a Language background given this kind of free rein are not being trained and supported in developing the kind of pedagogic strategies likely to prove effective when they are responsible for teaching post-16 as an NQT.

A further small point emerged with the age profile of some OU students. Ironically, some of the older students felt their grounding in grammar from their own schooling enabled them to teach post-16 English language more assuredly.

*I felt a confidence in teaching A' English language because I was taught very rigid grammatical structures and parsing exercises for years on end...so I went into language classes*

*feeling a bit more confidence in the subject than more recent graduates would.* (Participant in group interview 1)

Despite the evidence of this student's coping strategy, it does seem imperative, that post-16 English Language teaching is regarded as a training issue worthy of greater attention in course materials and that mentors take on the challenging problems described.

### **Connections from post-16 English**

Few students had strayed outside the confines of A level English teaching in their post-16 experience. For those who had, there was an intriguing geographical spread represented, with students from the north of England reporting a greater likelihood of engagement with GNVQ teaching:

*I taught GNVQ Advanced to Year 13 linked with communication skills. It was excellent, because it gave me the opportunity to experience a different field...and then help pupils to link with key skills...definitely worth doing if the option is there.* (e-conference msg 24)

The PGCE course itself offered little support to students encountering vocational alternatives post-16, but in some cases a mentor was able to utilise a student's previous professional background in a relevant vocational area. This was an important recognition of the range of skills OU students bring with them into teaching.

Students in the south of England reported little access to GNVQ, but were more likely to have observed or taught A Theatre Studies in their post-16 experience. In these cases some former actors, or students with joint degrees in Drama and English, were able to draw on synergies between teaching drama texts as literature and as pieces for performance. This seems to have been serendipitous rather than planned. Some mentors, and some departments, seemed unwilling to

adopt a flexible approach to timetabling, to enable students' strengths and interests to be fostered. Other students were wary of straying outside their single subject discipline of A English, fearing a broader experience would not count towards their evidence for meeting the Standards. In both instances, training opportunities were missed which could have celebrated students' broader professional knowledge.

## Conclusion

The literature on mentoring in English overlooks the need for training specific to the post-16 phase. Other than a limited input on strategies to teach Shakespeare with sixth formers, the PGCE course materials failed to highlight relevant issues and approaches. Sadly, the truth of the following comment is supported by many pieces of evidence:

*I certainly think the PGCE doesn't address how to teach A level English. (Mentor, school visit 3)*

This places a significant training burden on the mentor, one of whom admitted:

*She hasn't taught a full text at A level...in that sense she's ill prepared isn't she? Post-16 I think I am falling down in that I haven't discussed the syllabus enough with her...at a much earlier stage we need to get examples of A level work. (Mentor, school visit 2)*

Such evidence contributes to a perception of post-16 teaching being a frustrating experience for many students.

*At post-16 the pressure seems to be so focussed on passing exams and getting through texts that the teaching approaches at both schools appeared to be rather stifled, they spoon-fed pupils...whilst I recognise the pressure of work, I question*

*whether a more challenging approach isn't more effective:  
certainly I have been surprised by what pupils can do if  
pushed and what little they will do if allowed to. (e-  
conference msg 39)*

Mentors in this study have been reported as keeping out of the post-16 English classroom during training. Many mentors did not provide a range of challenging opportunities post-16. Very few appeared to explicitly recognise the potential benefits of students bringing new or experimental approaches to post-16 learning. The following reflection is an exception:

*I like taking postgraduate students...they come with fresh  
ideas, new ways of getting into texts and experimental ways  
of looking at things...our student initially planned a post-16  
lesson in the IT room with the internet...none of us do that at  
the moment so we're delighted that she is going to show us a  
way forward here. (Mentor, school visit 1)*

The experience of mentoring, for many students, appears to be hands-off or unchallenging in the post-16 English classroom. This is a particular problem for students struggling to develop differentiated approaches for their Year 12 literature pupils who have been reportedly traumatised by the leap from Year 11 GCSE work. It is also a problem for students offered practice in A English Language classes without the modelling of effective practice. A refined agenda for post-16 English training in ITT is urgently needed and might be created from the following:

*A lot does depend on your knowledge of the text and knowing  
your group and trying a variety of strategies...useful would  
be ideas on how to approach things at the outset...how to  
actually introduce pupils fresh from Year 11 to the whole of A  
English work. (Telerecorded interview 2)*

It is clear from the evidence in this study that lively discussion in English departments to cross-fertilise teaching strategies across literature and language classes post-16 might contribute to a more productive training relationship between the student and the mentor.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusions**

*I think teaching at post-16 puts in perspective in some way the rest of your teaching throughout the school.* (Student, school visit 1)

This study revealed significant problems for student teachers as they learned to teach post-16, which were confirmed by mentors. The implications for mentoring are significant. In summary, three key issues emerged from the research.

### **Issue 1: Post-16 mentoring**

It is clear from the range of data collected for this study that students have a preconception that post-16 teaching is unproblematic. This manifests itself in English as an inflated assumption at the start of training that teaching post-16 will be discussion based, with highly motivated, culturally aware, confident pupils. This goes some way to confirming what Powell (1992) and Bramald et al (1995) say about students' idealised notions of teaching. This misconception impacts on students' approaches to teaching post-16, with efforts at an undergraduate style seminar quickly disappointed in confronting the realities of the classroom. The passivity students experienced is partly explained by the prevailing gender imbalance, with English classes post-16 dominated by girls, who were reported as tending to lack confidence orally. Mentors acknowledged these issues, but failed to engage with students and missed a chance to challenge in their training role. Consequently, students felt traumatised by being thrown in at the deep end, particularly when limited to Year 12 teaching, which offered only a partial view of post-16 teaching.

When mentoring post-16 was "hands-off", students reported being left to sink or swim in their development as novice post-16 teachers. In order to survive, some fell back on the teacher directed approaches they had experienced as pupils, confirming what Elliott and Calderhead (1995) argued about the important influence of such experiences. It also reflects the dominance in A level of teacher directed pedagogy aimed at getting through the syllabus, as



described by Macfarlane (1993), and the tendency in schools to ignore post-16 pedagogy.

This scenario illustrates what might be termed the hidden curriculum of secondary ITT. The Standards for the award of a secondary PGCE pay lip service to post-16 teaching competence, but nowhere is there guidance as to what processes might underpin this, a point implied by Bloomer (1997). It seems that the focus for most mentors is almost entirely on 11-16 teaching, and that with very limited time available to them, as made clear in Dart and Drake (1993), mentors prioritise what they and their student teachers perceive as their most pressing issue: classroom management 11-16. Yet the particular demands on student teachers post-16 have been described differently to those at 11-16 by both student teachers themselves and their mentors.

*I had to watch other teachers and emulate their style of teaching post-16...preparing for sixth form teaching is a lot more time consuming than for anything else...you've always got to be the expert. (Telerecorded interview 3).*

The ITT Standards seem to carry an unwritten assumption that post-16 teaching is about subject knowledge in a single discipline A level, rather than any of the related A levels (Redford, 2000) or vocational alternatives (Butcher, 1998) offered in increasing numbers of schools. This underlines the continuing dominance of specialised A levels in schools (Lawton, 1992) as well as the prevailing narrowness of a post-16 curriculum (Higham, 1996). As a consequence, student teachers in this study felt under-prepared at the end of their PGCE for the potentially challenging range of post-16 teaching they might encounter.

Mentors seem to have made little impact post-16. This is important at a time when standards post-16 are under increasing scrutiny. It is also important that new teachers feel better prepared for all the teaching opportunities available to

them since professional confidence affects teacher retention, a pressing issue for policy makers.

Inconsistency of mentoring in relation to post-16 teaching is apparent. This is an important confirmation of what Reid and Jones (1997) found in mentoring generally and suggests similarities to mentoring in other contexts. From descriptions in the data, it seems mentoring in practice is difficult, with too little time available and insufficient clarity about the precise nature of the training role. This pressure is exacerbated post-16, with students often left to their own devices by mentors. This suggests differences from mentoring in other contexts, in which what might be seen as a DIY approach would be unacceptable.

The reported ad hoc nature of much mentoring around post-16 teaching serves to undermine the pretence that post-16 is an equal component of reaching the Standards. Not only are some student teachers minimally mentored for their post-16 teaching, but for those lucky enough to have a mentor who does engage fully with the post-16 experience, what support is given varies greatly:

*My mentor at the larger school was actually Head of sixth form...he just let me get on with it...he didn't have the time to give...I was observed once in the sixth form group. He said "That's brilliant, really good. I won't bother coming again".*  
(Telerecorded interview 4).

This is hit and miss training, something like the "laissez faire" mentoring described in McNally and Martin (1998). It results in questionable socialisation into the role of post-16 teacher, and students feeling intimidated at the prospect of post-16 teaching as an NQT. Mentors in this study appear not to have been adequately trained for their role in relation to post-16 teaching. The kind of prescriptions found in the earlier literature are inappropriate.

For mentors on this distance learning PGCE, isolation from other mentors seems to have reduced the breadth of training specific to post-16 they have been

able to offer. These teachers have perceived, for post-16 teaching, university training for mentors as a bureaucratic reminder that the Standards require some evidence of post-16 teaching, rather than an exercise in engagement with varied post-16 teaching strategies and discussion of subject knowledge.

## **Issue 2: The need for support and challenge to train in post-16 differentiation**

Post-16 subject knowledge, and differentiating that subject knowledge by effective teaching strategies, have been important concerns to emerge from students and mentors. Particularly problematic have been attempts to tackle the dilemma of how new teachers can plan teaching strategies to bridge the Year 11/Year 12 divide.

*These children have come fresh from GCSEs, from big classes, they are not used to the small group situation. It is the undergraduate seminar or the lecture which does not work at all well in schools. (Mentor, school visit 5).*

*The Year 12 classes were reluctant to contribute and preferred to take copious notes. Year 13 on the other hand, had gained a lot more confidence. (e-conference msg 4).*

There is a role here for mentors, but few of them in this study were able to articulate clear training in relation to post-16. There is however some evidence concerning those who were, of mentors being able and willing to support their student teachers in developing their professional thinking and classroom practice post-16:

*The mentor that we had tends to focus on what you're good at and uses that as a way into what you're doing...she introduces you as the expert...she draws on your background*

*and things that you could perhaps use.* (Participant in group interview 1).

*I usually start by asking her how she feels...I wouldn't dream of dictating something...as a mentor you have to treat these students with respect...we write the mentor notes up together.*  
(Mentor, school visit 2).

This is similar to what Daloz (1986) proposed as effective mentoring. In the context of this study it involved pre-placement discussion about post-16 issues and detailed pre-lesson discussion (purposeful talk) geared towards individual needs. This resulted in a variety of training, from a mentor deciding consciously to give a student a free rein post-16 to mentors providing very structured training opportunities. Such mentoring includes challenge, often in post-lesson discussion, but not approached in a confrontational way. The importance of mentors role modelling, and of students being trained by osmosis (as claimed by Hagger, 1995) are also notable.

However there is limited evidence of challenge being used in a context which might appear to warrant it as a training strategy. It would seem that a shared discourse about teaching post-16 needs to be in place to provide an environment in which challenge can be used by mentors as a strategy to develop student teacher understanding and enhance practice (Burgess and Butcher, 1999).

### **Issue 3: English exemplifying the need for post-16 mentoring**

It would appear that the particular educational circumstances and backgrounds of Open University PGCE English students can magnify concerns about subject knowledge and pedagogy post-16. Because of the age and gap between first degree and PGCE of many students, there is not always synergy between student assumptions about the experience of teaching post-16, and reality. Students were uniformly disappointed at the level of technical language, critical

skills and cultural capital demonstrated by Year 12 pupils, all of which they judged as vital (as did Daw, 1996). Many were shocked at the need to differentiate and to motivate. The effect on students was destabilising, because most did not have the opportunity to see progress made by Year 13 groups.

*During Stage 2 I taught Keats to an A level group. They did not have much confidence in their analytical abilities in relation to poetry...I reinforced some basic technical definitions...they did not feel they were ready to make the transition from GCSE to A level study in respect of poetry. (e-conference msg 2).*

Such experiences made these student teachers even more reliant on their mentors for training than their generally younger, full-time counterparts at traditional universities might have been. Yet mentors in this study, faced with fertile ground for mentor challenge, tended not to intervene early enough, if at all. Training was often described by the students in this study as haphazard and unstructured, and as a result, mentors have not always been able to address the key subject specific issues: the contentious nature of the English canon presented post-16 (Dart and Drake, 1996), and the limited attention given to effective post-16 English teaching strategies in the literature. Students have simply had to fit in with departmental approaches (Arthur et al, 1997), but in a way unmediated by their mentor. This impacted in a particularly significant way on those students learning to teach A English Language, an increasingly popular choice in schools.

Not only did students encounter pupils struggling with knowledge about language, but found existing teachers tended to be non-specialists who resorted to teacher directed strategies and were unable to offer training in subject knowledge or pedagogy. Linguistics graduates in this study were thus welcomed as “experts”:

*The staff are all literature trained, so with A English Language I am free to bring in my own material and encouraged to follow my own interests.* (Student, school visit 2)

If the PGCE course did not address sufficiently how to teach English in all its forms post-16, there is a vital training role for mentors. Few in this study took the opportunity. Challenge, as reported in much of the literature, seems rare.

### **Professional Implications**

On a personal level, this research has impacted considerably on me as a practitioner. The data gathered has provided strong evidence in support of the insights and perceptions on mentoring gained when I was a secondary school teacher based in a post-16 centre. Then, I felt that both the Standards and HEIs treated post-16 teaching as a Cinderella phase, a necessary hoop to jump through, but not a priority for student teachers. My fear that post-16 was an overlooked aspect of learning to teach has been confirmed.

The professional desire to address this problem in the context of ITT led to the original research question. My conclusions will impact on my current role as a teacher educator. Key issues about the nature of post-16 teaching will be drawn out in my writing on the Open University's flexible PGCE, and in my work with mentors and students in partner schools. Both opportunities will allow me to disseminate these findings and contribute to improved understanding about the importance of being trained to teach post-16 effectively.

Beyond my own practice, I believe the study has implications for secondary ITT colleagues and their mentors and students in other institutions. I have already disseminated some of the interim findings at conferences, and received feedback that the problems described were not confined to the OU PGCE English course. I intend to continue by publishing the final findings in academic journals and newspaper articles.

Beyond England and Wales, I want to engage in dissemination of the work to an international audience. A paper based on the interim findings was well received at a European conference, and I intend to follow that up at the AERA conference in the United States. A comparative dimension to the findings about mentoring strategies will be particularly valuable.

### **Post-16 Mentoring: the implications for English**

This study reveals a significant issue concerning students engaging with post-16 English teaching for the first time. The research literature, and the materials provided for students on this PGCE, did not prepare them for passive Year 12 pupils lacking cultural capital and critical skills. Mentors did not intervene early enough to challenge students' over-expectations about the nature of post-16 teaching. As a consequence students had to fall back on their own devices and many had their confidence shaken in the process.

It is imperative that students are prepared adequately with realistic expectations of post-16 classrooms by their course materials. On this particular programme, these issues will need to be written in with greater emphasis. It is also imperative that mentors are clear that their training role needs to encompass post-16 teaching in as detailed a way as much pre-16 mentoring. Between them, the range of possibilities post-16 need to be covered.

### **Implications for policy and practice in ITT**

An important prerequisite to any recommendations about improving the effectiveness of mentoring in relation to post-16 teaching is a recognition that no criticism of any individual mentor referred to in this study is intended. As a set of cases, the mentors in this study were busy teachers prioritising their central task, the education of their pupils. Most enjoyed the opportunity to mentor a student teacher, but invariably they did not have the time to engage with all the post-16 issues raised in this research. Neither did they always have

a clear understanding of their training role and the strategies with which to carry this out.

There are three recommendations, arising from analysis of the data. If any of the three were enacted by policy makers, it would do much to alleviate the problems with learning to teach post-16 raised by students. The first two are interlinked, the final one is essentially an alternative. First is to endorse the need for much more comprehensive training of mentors. There is an urgent need for government to acknowledge that teachers cannot be expected to undertake the role of mentor on the margins of their time, without adequate development of the skills required. In this context, such training must emphasise the importance of not overlooking the particular needs of post-16 teaching. Allied to this training is the need to properly resource the partner school to provide sufficient time for the mentor to focus on the post-16 experience as an integrated part of the ITT placement.

Second, an incentive needs to be provided by policy makers to “mainstream” training in the post-16 phase. Mentors seem to have the need to be provided with an unavoidable reason to have it on their training agenda. This could be prompted by a separate section in the Standards devoted to students demonstrating competence in post-16 teaching. This would need to be accompanied by far clearer guidance on the training opportunities that need to be offered post-16.

However, in practice there remain issues with the priority busy school mentors can give to the role, competing as it does with demanding teaching and administrative functions. The ITT Standards are already over-full, offering a significant challenge in themselves to students and mentors. If the resources are not there, how practicable is it to propose that mentors increase their training in relation to the development of students’ post-16 teaching?

The final recommendation is certainly not one I began this research expecting to make. It is based on a recognition of the impossibility of forcing a quart (the



Standards) into a pint pot (school experience). This leads, albeit tentatively, to a proposal to take competence in post-16 teaching out of the ITT Standards altogether. This would enable mentors to concentrate their training, as most of them appear to do now, in 11-16 teaching. Instead, post-16 development could be a prescribed part of every secondary NQT's induction year. Schools will appoint NQTs knowing one of their targets will be post-16 teaching. They will also know that an induction mentor will need to support and challenge the new member of their staff in developing effective post-16 teaching skills. Within the trusting, collaborative environment of the NQT's employing school, the importance of the post-16 experience could be more fully recognised and could be much enhanced.

I would suggest that for those NQTs working in LEAs with 11-18 schools, the benefits could be significant. No longer would new teachers depend on ineffective training in post-16 teaching skills squeezed into the ITT Standards. The Induction Year could be used to develop targeted mentor support to evaluate and support NQT need in this phase. This could include discussion of planning for, and observation of Year 12 literature teaching in order to develop skills in post-16 differentiation. It could also feature observation, or collaborative teaching of Year 13 classes.

Those NQTs who find themselves employed in LEAs with tertiary systems, as did two in this study, will start their Induction year working in 11-16 or 12-16 schools. My recommendation raises problems for those NQTs, although for some, access to post-16 classes could be arranged through a collaborative programme with their local tertiary college. However if the 14-19 strategy for education and training (DfES, 2001) takes root, with curriculum pathways and inspections covering 14-19 as a distinct phase of education, and opportunities for "good" 11-16 schools to open sixth forms, the problem currently presented by 11-16 institutions could become less significant.

However, it is imperative that no teacher wishing to train 11-18 is disadvantaged in any future career by beginning to teach in an 11-16 school. It

is also likely that, at a time of teacher shortages, many 11-16 schools would find it difficult to release NQTs for regular post-16 teaching experience elsewhere. Therefore, to be instigated in an equitable way, this recommendation would depend on a loosening of policy relating to the practicalities of provision 14-19.

Such a proposal might lead to a more consistent approach to post-16 mentoring. It would mean that opportunities for post-16 observation, collaborative teaching and observed solo teaching would be a significant focus for the employing school, rather than a haphazard bonus in an ITT partner school as at present. The proposal would also ally induction support more closely to the ITT Standards, creating a more seamless start to a novice teacher's career.

### **Reflexive evaluation of the research process**

The key question, in any methodological evaluation of a piece of research, is to what extent were the research tools appropriate for the research question? In my case, the methods were divided across the three phases of the research, and were designed to be fed iteratively into one another.

The intention in the first phase was to generate qualitative data on students' experience of learning to teach post-16. The relatively original method of electronic data collection used was effective. Sufficient data was produced, reflecting the naturalistic voices of sixteen students as they engaged with and reflected upon relevant post-16 issues. The asynchronous method of e-conference prompts and questionnaire delivered electronically allowed detailed student perspectives to be gathered efficiently. It should be noted that the students were already used to conferencing as a significant teaching and support medium on their course, and so the method was perhaps less of an imposition than more traditional research approaches.

The second phase, of student group interviews, was designed to develop a set of training needs in relation to post-16 teaching. These proved a rich source of

qualitative data, allowing emerging issues to be explored and clarified with, and between, the students present. They also allowed post-16 mentoring in different contexts and in different institutions to be compared. They provided for a consensus on training needs to be agreed.

The third phase, of research visits to students and mentors in partner schools and follow-up telerecorded interviews with students, was intended to test the emerging theory. In the former I explored what mentors did in their post-16 training. This was successful in generating data emphasising the need for support and challenge. In the latter I extended my questioning more directly into subject related training issues. The final phase provided a validation of the issues raised in the previous phases, and some triangulation of findings.

Had there been more time for this researcher to conduct the research, I feel sure I would have pressed mentors to allow me to observe a greater number of mentor debriefings of post-16 lessons. This would have provided more data on what mentors actually do as opposed to what students and mentors claim they do. However, I have no doubt such observations present significant ethical issues, not least in the potential for participants to feel implicated by the power relationship I possessed to them. If this meant being presented with a mentoring “performance” in front of a someone perceived to be an assessor, the value of data gathered would be severely devalued.

Key opportunities to follow up in the research would be to gain more contextualising information about the student and mentor participants and the schools in which the training took place. This would enable a richer picture to emerge of the idiosyncratic nature of the mentoring relationship, and to illuminate unique aspects of the post-16 English classroom.

Beyond the boundaries I set myself in this research, it would be fascinating to replicate the research in different settings, like FE colleges, or with students on full-time face-to-face PGCE courses. It would also be valuable, given the post-

16 pupil and student teacher gender imbalance in English, to explore further the impact of gender on mentoring styles (Daloz, 1986).

The process of writing up the research (what Phillips and Pugh, 1994 refer to as re-writing my research) has been a challenging one. The data analysis required considerable organisational skills, and required me to be continually reflexive about the meanings I was ascribing to the data as my thinking clarified. As my argument developed in the writing up of the literature review, I am conscious of new insights emerging as different viewpoints and arguments coalesced. The engagement with those ideas continued in the analysis of the findings, right through to the writing up of the conclusion. I am acutely aware of my impact as the researcher on the writing up. I have sought to be transparent about this, and to aim for objectivity via triangulated evidence sources. The story told reflects the complexities of researching part-time.

I remain convinced, and indeed am strengthened in my view, that improving the way student teachers are trained to teach English post-16 would enhance the learning experiences of pupils, and lead to improved standards and more confident teachers.

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## **Appendices**

# **Appendix 1**

**Stage 1 Pilot Study questionnaire prompts**

**Stage 1 Pilot Study interview schedule**

## **Research Questionnaire**

I am investigating PGCE English students' experiences of being challenged by mentors. I am particularly interested in data on the mentoring strategies used when you have been working with post-16 pupils. All responses will be treated confidentially.

### **1) Prior to starting your PGCE, what were your expectations of a mentor's role?**

a) Generally

b) In relation to teaching English to post-16 pupils

### **2) Prior to starting your PGCE, what were your perceptions of teaching post-16 English ?**

### **3) Challenge as a mentor strategy can be defined as moving a student through stages of professional growth by active interventions, ( including criticising preconceptions)**

a) Did you expect to be challenged?

b) Has your mentor challenged you?

c) If yes, describe how

**4) Was the challenge effective?** Explain how your practice/understanding improved

**5) Have you taught post-16 pupils yet? If yes**

a) Were you mentored specifically in relation to that post-16 teaching? Please give examples

b) Did your mentor challenge you on subject knowledge? Appropriate teaching methods? Other standards? Please give examples

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you have any further comments about mentoring strategies, or preparedness to teach post-16 English, please write below. Add your name if you would be interested in a follow up discussion.



## **Stage 1 Research**

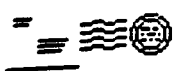
**Semi-structured interview prompts given to mentors and students separately**

- 1) Do student teachers expect to be challenged by their mentors?**
- 2) Is there a need for challenge in a mentor/student relationship**
- 3) Do mentors challenge?**
- 4) If yes, give examples of the sort of challenge strategies that are used.**
- 5) If used are those strategies effective? Why?**
- 6) Using an example from post-16 teaching: do mentors intervene in their training role?**

# **Appendix 2**

## **Examples of e-conference prompts**

### **Post-16 e-questionnaire**



25 October 1999 15:02:27

PGCE99 English 16+

From:

John Butcher

Subject:

Post-16 Conference

To:

PGCE 99 English

This will open officially on Monday 1st November, and run for one month. I will propose a broad weekly theme, offer some ideas/views and invite contributions.

### Why is it worth looking in?

Post-16 issues are often marginalised in the hurly burly of competing 11-16 portfolio activities, School Experience tasks and partner school priorities...yet experience in teaching post-16, and some insight into progression issues around post-16 are vital elements of the Standards leading to QTS. Many people will have taught, or at least observed post-16 English teaching already. Lots of you will be doing so on TIAS. Many of you will comment on post-16 teaching in your Career Entry Profiles, or have to answer questions on such teaching at interviews.

This sub conference will allow you to share ideas, appreciate the different situations colleagues are working in, and get on top of this rapidly changing area. It will support your reading of Block 6.

### Who am I?

I am Staff Tutor in region 2, seconded 2 days a week to Walton Hall as Deputy Director of the Postgraduate Programme. (So if you are thinking about MA in Education courses after PGCE, get in touch!)

Up until 1996, I was a Senior Teacher in a large comprehensive, responsible for a post-16 centre of 500 pupils. I taught A' level English (Language and Literature), A' level and GCSE Communication Studies, A' level English Literature, GCSE English (the resit...) and BTEC Nat. Dip. Performing Arts. At various times I was also responsible for CPVE (as was), GNVQ and General Studies. Before that I was a lecturer in FE, teaching the same sort of things to a slightly different set of students.

### Is it worth contributing?

Yes. My research suggests many mentors do not have the time to focus sufficiently on post-16 teaching skills and relevant curricular and policy issues. This conference gives you the opportunity to ask questions, explore ideas and reflect on experience (however limited). I hope many of you reading this will feel confident enough to log in a couple of times a week during the month (as I will) and take part.

### What will the outcomes be?

Enhanced confidence about teaching effectively with post-16 groups; greater insight into whole school and English post-16 issues; the chance to take part in a research project on how students learn to teach post-16 (information to volunteers to follow in the weeks to come...)

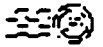
Best wishes  
John

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Title: Welcome

14 December 1999 14:11:45  
Page 1 of 1



03 November 1999 16:16:22  
PGCE99 English 16+ Item



From: John Butcher

Subject: Welcome

To: PGCE99 English 16+

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Better late than never.

I am sorry we were unable to start this conference on 1st November as planned, but various technical protocols have now been sorted out and I am now able to send messages. Please let us know if you are unable to send your contributions to this conference.

### Proposed Programme

#### Week 1

Teaching and learning in the post-16 classroom: what's different and what's the same? I would like to concentrate on literature teaching for this week

#### Week 2

English language teaching post-16, and the crossovers from teaching literature

#### Week 3

Broadening the range: Communication Studies, GNVQ, Drama...resits

#### Week 4

Bringing together the findings of our discussions about what makes for effective post 16 English teaching. I will end the conference with a summary of all the contributions for all students to print off.

I will put up a few ideas tomorrow. In the meantime, it would be really valuable if all students reading this would post up a brief message about their experience of teaching post-16 English in SE1, 2 or on TIAS thus far, describing any particular contexts in which they are working.

#### Some starters

Has post-16 teaching been what you expected?  
Has the course (including your mentor) prepared you for it?  
What help/advice/ideas would you appreciate over the next month?

Best wishes  
John

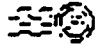
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14 December 1999 14:15:15  
Page 1 of 1



08 November 1999 16:57:26

PGCE99 English 16+ Item



From:  John Butcher

Subject: Reviewing where we've got to

To:  PGCE99 English 16+

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Many thanks for everybody's contributions over the weekend...

Some interesting points have emerged around teaching literature to post-16 pupils:

- 1) There seems to be an awareness of a Year 12/Year 13 split in terms of expectations and recognition of effective teaching and learning...
- 2) At Yr 12 teachers need to be aware of the huge jump (for many pupils) from GCSE experiences. Despite choosing to stay on, immaturity may limit motivation and limit the quantity of A' level work that can be handled. Pupils may be reluctant to contribute to discussion based lessons or to text oriented questions ("What does this line mean?"). So differentiation becomes very important...assumptions cannot be made about the depth of cultural capital pupils are bringing to their Yr 12 English lessons, but transitions can be made with enjoyable, confidence building approaches (drawn from the best 11-16 work?) which will make the technical language of poetry (for example) less daunting. I think it is important to keep pushing pupils at this stage, but to do so in a safe, good humoured (not sarcastic) environment.
- 3) At Yr. 13 teachers may expect a greater maturity in pupil understanding which will allow a more confident conceptualisation of studying literary texts at this level. The occasional lecture may be appropriate (even necessary to contextualise a new text) but I worry about passive pupils if this is over used. How does a teacher know post-16 pupils are learning? The agent provocateur approach may be worth trying at this level...but your pupils need to know you (where you are coming from as a teacher) to make this risk free. If done badly it could miss the less confident pupil completely.
- 4) What of girls taking notes and boys interacting orally? Is this what happens in all post-16 English classrooms. Who learns most...the talkers or the thinkers? And (again) how do you know? What can a teacher do to address this if necessary?
- 5) What of the demands on teachers to be "on the ball " for all their post-16 English lessons. Is that level of fluidity/brainstorming more demanding than pre-16?

Please continue to contribute, especially if you have taught The Wasteland. It can be done, but takes a lot of preparation!

nb Will address language ideas week 2 (say Thursday onwards) and key skills week 3

Best wishes  
John



12 November 1999 17:18:40

PGCE99 English 16+ Item



From: John Butcher

Subject: Language and Literature

To: PGCE99 Englisg 16+

Many thanks to all those of you who have contributed and responded in this conference while our focus was on teaching and learning in literature lessons post-16.

I would now like to move us all on to a consideration of language work with post-16 pupils.

Let me start with a bit of autobiographical information. When I was working in FE 15 years ago, I started teaching AEB 623 A' English (Language and Literature). This was considered a suitable syllabus for adult learners on Access and evening classes, featuring as it did opportunities for creative, reflective and discursive writing on Paper 1. An increasing number of 16 yr. olds began to opt for this rather than the pure lit. course (AEB 660). I became an examiner for Paper 1, and saw a period of real expansion of interest in language skills, and approaches which could translate to lit. work. When I went back to school teaching, I took this interest with me, and despite much opposition at the time from members of a department fiercely wedded to coursework based literature A' levels, introduced 623 there...it grew rapidly and within a couple of years was attracting far more pupil interest...I share this merely to underline how quickly times and fashions change, and to alert you to the micropolitical climate in which many English depts work.

I expect a number of you now have experienced English departments in which interest in advanced level work in language is taken for granted. Some of you will be exposed to the demands of the A' level in English Language and may already have investigated the syllabus and considered strategies for exciting and engaging language lessons.

#### Questions to address:

- 1) Have you been prepared by your degree course and the PGCE (including mentor input) for the subject knowledge demands of language work with post-16 students? If you feel ill-prepared, what steps are you taking to address what might be considered a shortfall when it comes to interview?
- 2) Have you tried non-fiction texts with your post-16 pupils (or observed such strategies?) What worked...what lessons can be drawn about effective learning?
- 3) Have you tried approaches more usually associated with language teaching in your literature classes, ie creative writing in the same genre, parody/pastiche, storyboarding scenes, turning drama into prose and vice versa, comparing the language devices in the openings of a series of novels...
- 4) Are you alert to language issues in your post-16 classes...use of sexist/racist/inappropriate language by pupils (or teachers!) or in selected texts? Is it your role to intervene? What of multicultural texts? Is it your role to stand firm against the misuse of the apostrophe, to uphold the beauty of the semi colon, to inculcate an academically acceptable use of language?

Please do respond, and raise any related issues

I will log in again on Monday

John



22 November 1999 11:25:12

PGCE99 English 16+ Item



From:  John Butcher

Subject: Alternatives to post-16 English

To:  PGCE99 English 16+

Thanks for the input on language teaching and learning...a little later than planned I would like to open a discussion around the wider range of possibilities with which English teachers post-16 can engage.

While none of what follows is likely to form a substantial part of your English PGCE portfolio, any can be considered as possible extensions to your teaching experience, and certainly could be valuable additional information for applic. forms and interviews.

**Step 1 Audit** briefly what other "English" activities you have seen taught post-16, whether at SE2 or TIAS...Put details up in this conference...do you have a view on the value of these to an English teacher?

**Step 2 Examples** might include aspects of GNVQ First, Intermediate or Advanced. Have you tried any yourself, even taking groups collaboratively within a class? If not, and your partner school offers GNVQs, plan to have a go at SE3. What is more relevant for you: teaching the English/communications aspect of core/key/commom skills, or offering to investigate teaching your own vocational background as a specialism (a number of you have journalistic experience...) Again, ask questions and make suggestions here...

**Step 3** What of possible input to **other A' levels?**...I taught Communication Studies at GCSE and A'Level to sixth formers, and General Studies to pupils following traditional 3 A' level routes...good fun and a way to extend interests, explore project work ideas, notions of audience etc...are your English colleagues engaged in such extras...ask your mentor...should you specialise, or broaden your cv?

**Step 4** Many of you will have been using **Drama** techniques in your English lessons...who has had a chance to observe/ teach A'Theatre Studies, A/AS Performing Arts, BTEC Nat Dip. Performing Arts? Worth asking your mentor if you possess relevant skills, and another dept. in your school offers such subjects...

Please share ideas...on this one, all of you will have come across



23 November 1999 11:55:12

PGCE99 English 16+ Item



From:  John Butcher

Subject: Re: Alternatives to post-16 English

To:  PGCE99 Englisg 16+

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As any of you who read to the bottom of my message will see, the last line did not get sent.  
The point I was trying to finish on, was that:

Across SE1, 2 and TIAS, I would hope all of you will have had the opportunity to see, teach, or discuss with a mentor or other colleagues the post-16 courses to which an English teacher might contribute, other than the obvious ones. If you haven't, take the opportunity now, or plan to do so on SE3. If there is something you are particularly interested in, but your 2 schools don't offer it, it seems perfectly appropriate to utilise a day of additional experience to arrange a visit to a local provider (ie, another school or FE college)

Ask in this conference if you want suggestions

Best wishes

John



Printed by: John Butcher  
Title: Re: TIAS post 16

14 December 1999 14:25:48  
Page 1 of 1



03 December 1999 15:17:25

PGCE99 English 16+ Item



From:  John Butcher

Subject: Re: TIAS post 16

To:  PGCE99 Englisg 16+

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Are there any positive experiences out there of working with your mentor on TIAS or SE2 in relation to teaching post-16?

What of working with/alongside/chatting to colleagues other than your mentor about post-16 issues?

Is post-16 the invisible aspect of the mentoring partnership?

And if so, how does any novice teacher learn how to teach post-16 classes effectively?

This is the final weekend for this conference to be live, so please feel free to respond. On Monday I aim to post a summary of the contributions, and to request responses to a (brief) electronic questionnaire.

Best wishes  
John



Unsent Message

From: John Butcher

Subject:

To: PGCE99 Englisg 16+

Cc:

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## Summary of English Post-16 Conference November-December 1999

### Teaching Literature at A' level

A clear difference between Yr. 12 and 13 was reported by a number of participants. This concerned the readiness of pupils to cope with the demands of A' level literature. At Yr. 12, many pupils seem immature and to lack confidence, and are daunted in particular by technical terms. It may be that the mystique of "A' level" makes them uncomfortable in making oral responses. A gender divide was described, with girls tending to take copious notes and boys more willing to answer. It was proposed that effective teaching in Yr. 12, particularly in the first couple of terms, needed to be about building bridges from GCSE study, building confidence and enthusing pupils about the way writers play with language.

At Yr.13, pupils were more confident academically, more aware of the need to think for themselves, and less likely to need prompting to respond. However, in schools which prioritise exam results, a danger was reported of a tendency towards a more traditional, text-centred teaching, feeding pupils annotations, which was unlikely to engage pupils in active learning.

A middle way was proposed, somewhere between the range of activities touching on surface meanings from GCSE, and the undergraduate seminar. It was suggested all students should reflect on how they learned when aged 16-19, and should evaluate what teaching has proved effective at KS4. Some students perceived A' level teaching as new, uncharted territory, while others felt confidence and enjoyment coming after recently completed degrees.

**Conclusion:** the key is differentiation. Recognise that A' level pupils are studying for a whole range of reasons, and do not assume motivation and intrinsic interest does not have to be worked at by the teacher. Think about the way you ask questions about a text, and what assumptions you are making about pupils' cultural capital.

**Recommendation:** prepare thoroughly to support pupil participation. Make creative use of video and audio, and do not be afraid of intertextuality.

### Teaching English Language

Reportedly a popular option in many schools, **A' level English Language** seems to present difficulties for some teachers and pupils. Be aware of the pupils scoring well at GCSE Language, who perceive this A' level to be easy, and who essentially misunderstand what it is about...start by asking pupils why they opted for this subject, and build from there.

Some participants in the conference expressed concern at the amount of linguistic theory in this A' level, and were worried at lacking the terminology from their previous studies. Others enjoyed the opportunity to teach some sociolinguistics, especially gender. Clearly, a literature-based English degree is not especially helpful for this, so suggestions about: Crystal Cambridge encyclopaedia. Coates Language and gender, Cameron & Wardough as supportive reading were helpful.

The need for literature specialists to share ideas and resources with linguistics specialists was highlighted, and reference made to Bleiman's Activities for A'level English as a useful shared

resource. Key strategies described included reading and summarising newspaper articles, and analysing an area like equality and language through Mills and Boon with a piece of writing continuing or flouting the style.

**Conclusion:** it is a duty of English teachers to critique technospeak and creeping americanisms...but what of estuary English and Prince Charles' views on grammar? Discuss

### **Alternatives**

Participants shared experiences in three main areas: **Theatre Studies** teaching; on **vocational** courses, and the place of **contextualising** knowledge.

It was agreed that approaches to teaching A' Theatre Studies were of use if utilised to inform English teaching. For example, shared texts like *The Dolls House* allowed English teachers to reflect on issues around medium, genre and specific teaching strategies like freeze framing. Key for inclusion in the Portfolio were evidence about how these discoveries informed our development as English teachers, including subject knowledge auditing and evolving reading logs.

**GNVQ** teaching, in particular, offered enjoyable ways for English teachers to be involved in a broader post-16 curriculum. Firstly, were examples from those students who had employed English skills in a vocational context. This included research skills (including internet searches), interviewing, letter writing and more general confidence building. Secondly, were those situations in which students had taken the opportunity to use their professional knowledge in a school context, whether from Administrative or journalistic backgrounds. All were reported as fun to teach.

An interesting debate took place around the range of contextualising knowledge students might bring to their English teaching on any course. Some favoured an ongoing use of art, politics, sociology, theatre and history to make a text come alive. Others felt an initial contextualising input and brief reminders were sufficient for effective English teaching. Good use was reported of art prints (for example) as stimulus.

However, a tension was reported in those schools in which a mentor might favour a context driven approach whereas another teacher might dismiss such approaches.

### **Conclusions**

**Pupils** taking English courses post-16 vary enormously. Some will read only what is covered in class, while others will go voraciously beyond the set texts. In Yr. 12 in particular, teachers need to handle such variation gently, with an aim to eventually excite and enthuse all their post-16 pupils about learning English. Motivation cannot be assumed.

The **mentor** role is undertaken in a varied way in relation to post-16 teaching. For some students, guidance has been non-existent and mentoring has been invisible. For others, a hands-on approach has been welcomed, with positive suggestions, resources and cribsheets provided. This has been especially effective for those students being introduced to A' level teaching.

Some **teaching strategies** observed have been characterised as spoonfeeding to pass exams. Students have questioned whether a more challenging approach would not push pupils to learn even more.

Given the interconnections described above, should English teachers be pushing for a broader **Baccalaureat** type post-16 qualification, to enable a more stimulating, less balkanised experience for post-16 pupils?

John Butcher



08 December 1999 17:08:20

Message



From:  John Butcher

Subject: Post-16 Questionnaire

To:  PGCE99 Englisg 16+

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## Post-16 English Teaching Questionnaire

(All responses will be treated in confidence and reported anonymously)

**1) What experience of post-16 English teaching have you had so far ? Please list**  
*(ie SE1, SE2, TIAS/A' Eng Lit, GCSE resit etc)*

**2) What did your mentor do to support this teaching?**  
*(ie discussion beforehand, observation and feedback, collaborative etc)*

**3) Did your mentor challenge your expectations about pupil learning and effective strategies at this level? If so, how?**

**4) If your mentor was not involved, what resources did you draw on to plan and evaluate your post-16 teaching?**  
*(ie your own model of being a post-16 pupil? Being an undergraduate...etc)*

**5) With hindsight, what mentor involvement would you have found effective?**

**6) Is there any other information about your experience of teaching English post-16, or of your discussions or observations around this topic, that might be relevant?**

**7) Would you be willing (in principle) to host a research visit during SE3?**

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*(it would involve me coming to observe a mentor session devoted to post-16 teaching, and having a chat with you and your mentor... it would not be an OU monitoring or assessment visit)*

If so, please give the name of your school and your mentor

Many thanks for your participation. Please reply to  
John Butcher  
Staff Tutor Region 2

# **Appendix 3**

## **Group interview schedule**

## **Appendix**

### **Group Interview Prompt Questions**

- 1) Please describe what post-16 English teaching you have had or observed at your partner school and TIAS placement. *(This was designed to enable all to contribute in a safe way as a prelude to the real discussion).*
- 2) What were your expectations of post-16 English teaching before you started the course? On what did you base these expectations? *(This was designed to prompt all students to feel comfortable in commenting on their image of post-16 teaching).*
- 3) What have you learned about post-16 teaching from the experiences you described? How, particularly if your experience has been limited to one school, have you been socialised into a model of acceptable post-16 teaching? *(This was designed to probe any changed image of post-16 teaching students now possessed).*
- 4) Describe your mentor's role in impacting on your understanding and practice of post-16 teaching...unpicking any different approaches across two schools as appropriate. Were assumptions made about your competence in being ready to teach post-16? Has your mentor specifically addressed the Standards: subject knowledge; teaching strategies; assessment; wider role; ICT? *(This was designed to investigate the precise areas in which mentors intervened in relation to post-16 teaching).*
- 5) What else would you have wanted from your mentor in relation to post-16 teaching? Did your mentor challenge your thinking? *(This was designed to illuminate the match between student needs of their mentors, and the approaches mentors actually adopt).*
- 6) What are your feelings about taking sole responsibility for teaching a post-16 class as a NQT? Have you had a comprehensive enough preparation? *(This was designed to highlight gaps in course provision through what might be called the "fear factor").*

# **Appendix 4**

**Administration of research visits**

**Research visit interview schedule**

**Telerecorded interview schedule**



29 February 2000

Dear Student

Research Visit: March-April 2000

During SE3, I intend to undertake 8 visits to PGCE English students on their final placement. The purpose of these visits is for me to gather data on student experience of teaching post-16 English and mentor support in this area. The visits are for research purposes and are quite separate and distinct from any monitoring/assessment tracking visits.

I would like to visit you as part of this research sample. Ideally, I would like to co-observe (with your mentor) you teaching a post-16 lesson and then listen to your mentor feedback/debrief on the lesson. I would also like to interview your mentor about issues around post-16 teaching. I recognise that time for both you and your mentor is limited during teaching practice, but would be happy to accommodate whatever time frame you are able to offer. If only one or two of the opportunities outlined above are possible, I would still be very pleased to come.

The purpose of the research visit is explained in the attached sheet. Perhaps you could share this with your mentor, and then complete the reply slip enclosed with this letter. If either you or your mentor has any queries about the visit, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you and your mentor.

Yours faithfully



John Butcher  
Staff Tutor in Education

## Research Outline

### OU PGCE English students learning to teach post-16

The research literature, government policy directives and mentor training programmes tend to neglect student teachers experience of working in post-16 classrooms. Priorities (understandably) are on meeting the Standards across 11-16 teaching. However, increasing attention given to broadening the post-16 curriculum (with the aim of attracting and retaining more pupils into post-compulsory education), suggests discussion about what it means to teach post-16 effectively would be valuable.

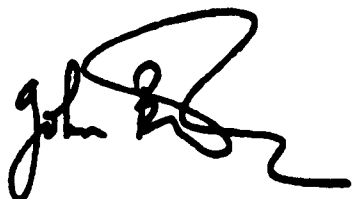
I have been researching this area for 4 years, interviewing OU and non-OU student teachers, discussing with mentors and gathering data from other sources including electronic questionnaires. The final phase (March-April 2000) is to take place in schools on a series of research specific visits this term. These will involve 3 data gathering strategies to ensure the mentor voice comes through.

- i. Co-observe, with mentor, an OU PGCE student teaching a post-16 class
- ii. Observe the mentor-led feedback/debrief of that post-16 lesson
- iii. Interview with mentor about post-16 teaching (and the demands on a student to teach this phase effectively)

All data gathered will be treated anonymously in the final report. Comments will be audio-taped for subsequent transcription. The findings and recommendations will (I hope) find their way into a dissertation, an article in an academic journal and coverage in the TES. They will also inform the rewrite of our Secondary ITT programme across all subjects but particularly English.

I sincerely hope you feel the research may be of some value and will feel able to contribute to it.

Many thanks.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Butcher', with a stylized, flowing script.

John Butcher

**Research : OU PGCE English students learning to teach post-16**

Student name ..... Region .....

Mentor name .....

School address .....

.....

.....

School Tel No .....

- |   |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | We are happy to host a research visit   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | We can offer i) observation of post-16 teaching   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|   | ii) observation of mentor debriefing  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|   | iii) interview with mentor  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | Our suggested dates/times would be:<br><i>(please offer up to 3 days with am or pm from 13 March - 7 April)</i>     |                          |                          |
| 4 | We would prefer not to host a research visit <input type="checkbox"/>   |                          |                          |
| 5 | If you answered 4, would you/your mentor be happy to have a conversation about post-16 teaching over the telephone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Please return in the enclosed pre-paid envelope by Wednesday 8 March 2000**

**Please return to:**

***John Butcher, Staff Tutor in Education  
The Open University, Foxcombe Hall, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5HR***

## **Interview Schedule for research visits March-May 2000**

### **Administered to students and mentors separately**

- 1) My research thus far has highlighted the voice of PGCE English students. They raise three issues in relation to post-16 teaching:

Students begin with an over-high expectation of what Year 12 pupils will be capable of.

Initial post-16 teaching strategies consist of asking lots of questions, in the manner of an undergraduate seminar, hoping discussion will happen.

Post-16 pupils lack cultural capital and tend to be passive learners, especially the girls.

Does your experience coincide with this? How do you respond to such findings?

- 2) Do student teachers need to be trained in activities to bridge the Year 11/Year 12 gap?

If agreed, what might this involve?

- 3) Mentors have limited time availability, so support is inevitably concentrated on the 11-16 experience.

Is that how the relationship worked in this instance?

Has there been support or challenge in relation to post-16 teaching?

Talk about one episode

- 4) What is your personal construct of English?

Does your English department have an explicit view of English?

Was there sufficient time for the student to be socialised into that or any view?

Were there any tensions?

- 5) Is the student sufficiently prepared to take sole responsibility for some post-16 teaching as a NQT from September?

## **Appendix**

### **Telerecorded interview prompt questions**

- 1) My research has highlighted the student voice, confirmed by mentors, that there are three problematic issues shared by students new to post-16 teaching:
- i) They possess an over-high expectation of what Year 12s are capable of
  - ii) Planned teaching strategies initially consist of asking lots of open questions in the manner of an undergraduate seminar, assuming discussion will take place
  - iii) Pupils lack cultural capital, and tend to be passive learners, especially the girls
- Does your experience coincide with all or any of those?

- 2) Student teachers need to be shown or trained in activities to bridge the Year 11/12 gap and break that passivity.  
Do you agree? Give an example

- 3) Mentors have limited time availability, so support is inevitable concentrated on the 11-16 teaching experience.  
Was it like that for you in your partner school?

- 4) Did your partner school English department communicate an explicit view of what English was? Was there sufficient time to be socialised into that view?

- 5) Do you fear being insufficiently prepared to take sole responsibility for some post-16 English teaching as an NQT in September?